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CANDID

AND

IMPARTIAL INQUIRY

INTO THE

Present State

OF THE

METHODIST SOCIETIES

IN

IRELAND:

WHEREIN

SEVERAL IMPORTANT POINTS

RELATIVE TO THEIR

DOCTRINES AND DISCIPLINE

ARE DISCUSSED.

BY A MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY.

Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, sed magis amica Veritas.

ERASM.

BELFAST:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Public, and particularly those who may feel interested in the following work, are respectfully informed, that it was originally undertaken at the pressing instance of some friends, with an intention to limit the observations entirely to what will now constitute the latter part of it, viz. "The expediency of the Methodist Preachers assuming their unquestionable privilege, and administering the ordinances of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord." But, in attempting this, the author felt the necessity of some general observations being made upon the present state of the Methodist Societies in Ireland, as introductory to the proposed plan, and was insensibly drawn into the consideration of subjects which appear to him of vital and primary importance to the interests of religion, and which now form the First Part of this work. These, however, are by no means the spontaneous effusions of the moment; they are the result of many years' observation and research: and it will be evident to the most cursory observer, that in the variety of topics touched upon, it was much more difficult to curtail, than to enlarge the ideas that presented themselves from so fertile a subject.

To limit his observations as much as possible, without absolutely defeating the end in view, has been the constant study and aim of the author; and particularly so, as his chief object is to furnish hints to abler hands, and wiser heads to work upon. Considering also the circumstances of a majority of those who are likely to form the bulk of his readers, he has laboured for their accommodation, to render it as short and as cheap as possible. In pursuance of this plan, he has judged it expedient to divide the work into two parts which may be had separately.

TO THE

MINISTERS

OF THE

METHODIST CONNEXION.

Fathers and Brethren,

After a solemn dedication of the following work to the glory of the Triune God, whom you serve in the gospel of Christ, and worship in spirit and truth: and to the general service of his church militant upon earth; to whom can its protection and patronage be so properly committed as to you?—You, who are the divinely commissioned ambassadors of God, bearing glad tidings of salvation to mankind, and the proper guardians of the spiritual interest of those societies, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers? Permit me therefore, honoured Fathers, to dedicate the following Essays to your favoured patronage.

Your deep acquaintance with the infirmities incident to humanity, will induce you tenderly to overlook the defects which your penetration may discover, and which, (considering the circumstance of the author being involved in the care and management of an extensive secular concern,) cannot be few: yet you will appreciate with candour and indulgence, whatever may be deemed worthy of approbation: which your piety will direct you to ascribe to the gracious influence of that God, from whom alone cometh every good and perfect gift. And as far as sincerity and truth appear to have guided the pen of the writer, your conscientious attachment to those sacred principles will insure them a cordial reception and effectual support, equally distant from prejudice and partiality. And above all, in giving glory to our common Lord, in labouring to edify, instruct, and profit the living members of his mystical body upon earth, you will co-operate with the more humble, but, I trust, not less sincere and zealous efforts of

Your affectionate brother in Christ,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE term METHODIST was contumeliously bestowed upon that select body of christians, who, about the year 1730, first began to unite themselves in social bands, for the sole purpose of seeking the salvation of their souls, in the experience, enjoyment, and practice of that holy religion, which, having its source in faith in the Son of God, works by love, purifies the heart, and inspires a well-founded hope of eternal life; and, extending its energetic influence to every power and faculty of soul and body, produces the fruits of inward holiness, and outward conformity to the precepts of the gospel; thus demonstrating itself to be, that which is ordained of God as the great medium of salvation to mankind. This was the religion they sought, and this religion they found; and for this they obtained the reproachful name of *Methodists;* which, if it did nothing else, added another proof of the truth

of St Paul's words, "That all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."—2 Tim. iii. 12.

This took place at the university of Oxford. The Reverend John and Charles Wesley were eminently conspicuous as leaders of this little band of christians. They gladly endured the obloquy and reproach which the strictness of their piety, the fervour of their zeal, and the ardour of their charity drew from the learned professors of christianity in that consecrated seminary. It appears that the *novelty* of genuine piety, exhibited in a christian college, first excited the wonder and astonishment, then provoked the ridicule and contempt, and finally produced the decided opposition, and, as far as it could be carried, the persecution of those men whose sole business in this world, had they attended to it, was to promote, defend, and propagate that very piety, which unhappily became the object of their aversion and scorn, when actually exhibited in the lives of its genuine professors.

The index of their contempt and derision was the term Methodist, in allusion, it is said, to an ancient class of physicians who bore that title on account of their doing every thing relative to their profession by a *method* peculiar to themselves. It

has, however, been ascertained from undoubted authority, that a religious sect in England, remarkable for their piety, bore this appellation forty or fifty years before Mr Wesley's day; and it is most probable that the name was derived from them. Be that as it may, the term is not only harmless, but conveys an idea of regularity and arrangement, which seems entitled to praise rather than contempt. In the mouths of ungodly men, however, it became a watchword of reproach, applicable to every one who displayed any symptoms of being infected with the true religion, promulgated and exemplified in the doctrines and practice of the blessed Jesus, and his holy apostles. The generality of mankind in this nominally christian country, can bear with a form of godliness; but its life and power admits of no toleration. With them this is mere enthusiasm, folly, or even madness; or, in one word, it is downright Methodism!

In spite, however, of reproach and opposition, the leaven of piety spread from Oxford to London, and, under the fostering care of its divine author, gradually extended its sacred influence to every part of the British dominions in Europe; then crossed the Atlantic Ocean, took root in America, and spread over the British colonies in the West Indies; while another branch entered the Mediter-

ranean, and extending itself to Gibraltar, advanced from thence to the western coasts of Africa; and is just now about to enter the immense regions of Indostan and the adjacent islands. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed!"

The successors of the venerable saints, who first trod the path of piety under the denomination of Methodists, are found in the persons to whom the following work is principally addressed. They are sharers in the reproach of their predecessors, and, we trust, inherit also some portion of their original spirit. Having embraced a religion which is incompatible with the "friendship of this world," (James, vi. 4.) and assumed a name indicative of the hatred and scorn of wicked men and infidels, it behoves them the more strictly to examine their principles and their practice, their doctrines, their discipline, and economy; that these being conformable to the oracles of inspiration, and the soundest principles of reason, fortified by experience, may become entitled to the praise which is of God, and the approbation of good men.

It rests with the professors of Methodism, to demonstrate to the world, as well as to their own people, that the religion they profess is, in practice as well as in theory, and in doctrine as well as in discipline, the identical religion which the Son of

God came down from heaven to inculcate and establish as the grand medium of salvation to mankind. For if it is not substantially and essentially this, it is not only unworthy of support, and incapable of vindication, but is in fact a delusion, the very name of which should be banished from the face of the earth.

"To the law and to the testimony:"—If Methodism be indeed the genuine offspring of heaven; if it be a real emanation from the spirit of holiness, let its celestial plumage reflect the radiant beams of the sun of righteousness;—place its transcendent excellencies in the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, and compel the christians of other denominations to acknowledge the sacred fountain from whence it flows;—display the dignity of its illustrious nature in so commanding a light, that even infidelity itself shall venerate its purity, and admire its morality; while the believer in Jesus recognises at once the majesty of the law, and the benignity of the gospel, happily blended in its sound principles and evangelical doctrines! So shall we succeed in putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, while we command the respect, and attract the esteem and love of every true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ upon earth.

But, Brethren of the Methodist Societies, and

particularly ye preachers of the everlasting gospel among us, you cannot forget, that however excellent your religion is, you nevertheless bear this treasure in earthen vessels. That you are encompassed about with infirmities, and exposed to innumerable temptations, from neither of which can you expect to be wholly emancipated while inhabiting a tabernacle of clay, and resident in an enemy's country. That even the pure and incorruptible grace of God is in you liable to be mixed with the dross of human passions; and however upright may be your intentions, however pure may be your first principles, yet errors in judgment may mislead, or the bias of nature may sometimes warp either your understanding or affections from the simplicity and innocence of the truth as it is in Jesus. From the danger of these you cannot claim exemption until this mortal shall have put on immortality.

Hence we see the absolute necessity of occasionally investigating our principles, of examining the doctrines believed and taught among us, as well as scrutinising the characters and talents of our preachers. And hence also we see the absurdity of ascribing absolute perfection to, or stamping with the seal of infallibility, the writings of even the venerable founders of the Methodist Societies.

It is true, we take the writings and arrangements of Mr Wesley as the true standard of Methodism; and we do well,—because we believe them to be founded in the truth of revelation, and supported by the whole economy of grace. But in doing this, we do not surrender the right of private judgment; nor did Mr Wesley ever attempt to take this away. Had he done so, it would have been the duty of every preacher in the connexion to have resisted him. But he did no such thing: on the contrary, the right of private judgment, is explicitly maintained in the Minutes of Conference. Preachers, indeed, are bound to embrace and support the general doctrines promulgated in the writings of Mr Wesley; but experience teaches us that this is done, subject to the various modifications of every man's own mind. We are well aware of the high veneration and esteem, in which the writings and authority of Mr Wesley, are deservedly held in the Methodist societies. Far be from us, a design of depreciating either the one or the other! But surely no man can lay claim to the character of a faithful steward of the mysteries of God, who does not preach the gospel from a higher authority than that of Mr Wesley, and it is from a conviction of their truth, and conformity to the doctrines of Christ and his apostles

alone, that such a man can conscientiously propagate the principles of that celebrated and enlightened divine.

Your enemies have reproached you with an implicit adoption of every sentiment conceived and propagated by Mr Wesley, upon his sole authority. The writer of this can acquit you of the charge. To the general orthodoxy, the acute penetration, the ardent zeal, and the inflexible integrity of that able minister we all rejoice to bear ample testimony, but you will not sacrifice your characters as ministers of the gospel of Christ, by a voluntary surrender of your private judgments to any man; and if these, in any given instance, should deviate from the opinions of Mr Wesley, you will with modest firmness maintain your own sentiments until convinced of your error. This the writer well knows to be your laudable practice, at least in private life; thus illustrating by your example the propriety of the Latin motto prefixed to this work; a sentiment which every minister of the gospel, who designs to discharge the important duties of his calling with conscientious fidelity, must make his own, following Mr Wesley indeed with earnest diligence so far as he follows Christ and his apostles; but, at the same time, resolved, with St Paul, "to know no man after the flesh!"

That there is, and long has been, a considerable relaxation in the spirit of genuine piety, in the Methodist societies in Ireland, is a fact which, however it may be deplored, will not be disputed by the friends of truth and religion. It is notorious, that conversions are both less numerous and less conspicuous than they were in the earlier days of Methodism; and vital religion decays in an equal proportion in the hearts and lives of many professors among us. Hence the frequent occasion our preachers feel for addressing their congregations from such passages of scripture as occur in Rev. iii. 1.-3. at the same time that we must contend for the application of verse 4, to multitudes in our societies. Yet the great necessity for a general and powerful revival of the work of God among us, meets us at every corner of the kingdom, and seems to point at some radical defect as yet unexplored, whose silent but pernicious ravages are gradually sapping the foundations of that singular excellence, to which, as a religious body, we once thought we had a just and legitimate claim.

What that defect is, how far it may be susceptible of a cure, or what that cure should be, the author of this presumes not to determine. But he does conceive himself warranted in presuming, that at least

a partial direliction, in point of doctrines, may have some share in the production of that unfavourable state of many societies, which demands an immediate remedy. And this important fact, he fears, will acquire a corroborative proof from a perusal of the following sheets. The hope of being humbly instrumental in at least furnishing some useful hints to those whose superior stations, talents, and influence, point them out as the proper and efficient agents in a work of reformation, and of arousing their attention and directing their energies to this important issue;—this, and this alone, has been the impulsive motive that has induced the individual effort which appears in the following work. Happy would the writer have been to have seen this important subject in abler hands; sincerely conscious as he is that many such are to be found in the connexion. But although the silence of these genuine and living pillars in the fabric of Methodism, has compelled him reluctantly to yield to the pressing solicitations of a number of highly respected and beloved friends, in laying his thoughts before the public, yet he consoles himself with the hope that the matter will ultimately be taken up by the legitimate guardians of the Methodist societies; and that the line he has thus presumed to chalk out, may furnish the basis of a

more mature and perfect plan for securing, under the divine blessing, the future increase and prosperity of the Methodist societies.

The author trusts he will obtain credit, when he asserts that he has no wish to excite a spirit of controversy. But though he has no design to provoke this, yet he by no means dreads it. A spirit of free discussion is perfectly compatible with the genuine spirit of christianity. The late venerable and truly reverend Mr Fletcher has at once demonstrated and exemplified this. Should any thing of a controversial nature spontaneously arise out of the following remarks, let it be conducted upon the model laid down by that excellent divine and acute disputant. The cause of religion will then not lose, but infallibly gain by a free and friendly discussion. A dignified temperance in language, a cheerful gravity of style, a solidity of argument, and above all, a genuine spirit of love, are the essential qualities which should form the basis of all controversies on religious topics. That the author of the following work has humbly aimed at those qualities, he can confidently avow; how far he may have succeeded is not for him to judge. But he has certainly laboured in every page and in every line to wage a continual war with error; and in doing this he has stre-

nuously endeavoured to press into his service the truth of God, sound divinity, and genuine piety.

If in the course of the work, the author appears to have occasionally taken a decided part in an argument, he trusts that will not be considered as dictating to his respected and beloved brethren; but merely as furnishing hints for their consideration, and suggesting what appears to him to be that truth which, as the unprejudiced advocates of pure and undefiled religion, they are bound to maintain and defend. But the author is well aware that his opinions are entitled to attention and respect, only so far as they are found conformable to the oracles of inspiration.

Some apology is due to the public, for the circumstance of its being anonymous. If the work possesses any merit, the author is by no means anxious to monopolise the credit of it. To the Methodist Connexion he is indebted for whatever knowledge he may have gleaned up, respecting the important subjects therein discussed, and to that connexion the work belongs; they will excuse its defects, and duly appreciate its value.

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PART I.

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UPWARDS of sixty years have now elapsed, since the wise and gracious providence of God first commissioned the late pious and truly reverend John and Charles Wesley,* in conjunction with their fellow-labourers in the gospel of Christ, to bring the

* It was on the 9th of August 1747, that the Rev. John Wesley first landed in Dublin. The author's father, who was

glad tidings of *salvation by faith**, and the knowledge of that salvation by the remission of sins into this part of the British empire. In many districts of this country, the inhabitants, particularly

then Mr Wesley's travelling companion and fellow-labourer, accompanied him. Mr Charles Wesley with other preachers, followed soon after.—As the ambassadors of God, these venerable men were honoured with considerable persecution, and were roughly handled by many a zealous mob, who naturally fought for their master. Nor would the magistrates in those days readily grant the preachers that protection to which the laws of God and man so justly entitled them. But the influence of reason and religion, the progress of civilisation and literature, have at length subdued those disgraceful outrages on civil society in most parts of Ireland.

* This included repentance towards God, and the forgiveness of sins; reconciliation with God, and the consequent justification of their persons and characters. With a full restoration to the divine favour, it promised a plenitude of mercy, grace, and peace. With the fruits of righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost, it united the testimony of a good conscience, and the in-dwelling spirit of God, bearing witness with their spirits, that they were his children by grace and adoption; having been by the regenerating power of that grace, translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. And it inforced the necessity of purity of heart, of a life uniformly devoted to the glory of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures, in works of piety, charity, and universal benevolence. And upon these foundations it erected the blooming hope of a glorious immortality, in the realms of eternal felicity. This was the substance of their preaching, and these are the present principles of Methodism. We ask, are not these the scriptural marks of *genuine christianity*? Are they not the common privilege of all christians; and can any thing short of this religion suffice for the salvation of men?

among the lower ranks, were then absorbed in the grossest spiritual darkness and superstition: while their intellectual acquirements scarcely qualified many of them to support the character of a civilised people, they were the subjects of the most profound ignorance, with regard to the important concerns of religion. To these neglected and untutored inhabitants of Ireland, were the pious and charitable labours of the primitive Methodists principally directed. Nor were they suffered to labour in vain. It pleased that gracious God, "whose tender mercies are over all his works," to make those venerable messengers of his grace the honored instruments in his hand of turning many of their hearers "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." These became living and dying witnesses of the reality of that religion, which was then propagated among them; it soon proved itself to be indeed "the power of God unto the salvation" of those, who cordially embraced it, and experimentally felt its divine energy in their souls. These accredited ambassadors of God then sowed in the hearts of listening multitudes the seeds of that "kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," which, by the blessing of God, hath since taken deep root, and is now extending its fruitful branches over every part of the united empire.

Then it was that those able ministers of the new covenant, and wise master-builders in the church of God, laid the foundation of those religious societies, which, while they distinguish the Methodists as a body of professing christians, have been blessedly

instrumental in maintaining a considerable portion of the power, as well as the form, of the actual practice, as well as the genuine principles of vital godliness, among you, who are the successors and followers of those faithful servants of God, now gone to their eternal reward.

You need not be told, that the diffusion of those principles, and the establishment and preservation of that practice, are the sole objects in view, in the continuation of those societies, and of that christian fellowship and social discipline, which is so happily cultivated among you, and which, under the protection of heaven, have now extended their benign influence over almost every part of the kingdom. Governed by these, you have generally exhibited a practical demonstration of the purity of your principles, and their conformity to the gospel of the meek and lowly Jesus, whom you honour as your Redeemer, and follow as your great exemplar. For even your enemies, upon a close inspection of your lives and doctrines, have been often constrained to acknowledge, that your motives are pure and disinterested; and that your main design is to promote the glory of God, in the dissemination of your Redeemer's grace, in the conversion of sinners from the error of their ways, and the eternal salvation of those who love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth. Nor can they deny, that God hath made you eminently instrumental in the advancement and extension of this glorious work; the instances of your success have been too numerous and too conspicuous to admit of a doubt upon that

point. The character of your preachers, as legitimate ministers of the gospel, is therefore established upon a basis too firm to be shaken by the breath of calumny, or the tongue of falsehood; and if you have now any avowed enemies, any who still deride or oppose your indefatigable exertions for the propagation of genuine christianity, you have the consolation to know, that these are in general also, the secret or open enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ,—the decided adversaries of that religion which he lived and died to establish in the hearts of his people.

You have also abundant cause to rejoice with reverence before God, that in his ~~in his~~ infinite wisdom and endless mercy, he hath hitherto given you an abundant supply of pastors after his own heart. He hath raised up and supported in continual succession, a chosen and faithful body of men, to minister unto you the word of life. To these he hath given the spirit of wisdom, to speak a word in season, to the consolation of the afflicted mourners in Zion, and to the edification of those who can rejoice in a sin-pardoning God, by faith in the Son of his love. These are not only your instructors in the things which pertain to the kingdom of God, but are your spiritual fathers in the gospel, having been instrumental in turning you from the error of your ways, convincing you of your ruined state while aliens from God, and strangers to the covenant of redemption; they have pointed you to the lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, and have introduced you into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

If this character, and a portion of similar success, is justly claimed by the ministers of other churches also (and God forbid that we should dispute it,) yet it must be acknowledged it more abundantly belongeth to those of the Methodist connexion. For these being little indebted to human learning for their qualifications as ambassadors of Christ, are constrained to apply to the fountain-head, for the gifts and graces requisite to qualify them for that important office. Accordingly, we find they seek, under the influence of the spirit of holiness, for a deep and intimate acquaintance with the gospel plan of salvation, by a studious application to the oracles of God. For their own experimental knowledge of the sacred truths thence derived, as well as the powerful application of them to the hearts of their hearers, they confess themselves indebted exclusively to the inspiration of that holy spirit* who dictated the scriptures of truth,

* Whatever may be the sentiments of the profane or lukewarm professors of christianity, it is the glory of the Methodist societies that by their principles, the inspiration of the spirit of God is esteemed absolutely necessary to the effectual conversion and final salvation of any individual; and, of course, equally essential to a successful propagation of the sacred truths of christianity. Indeed, this great and important doctrine is so fully established and so amply supported in the holy scriptures, that we can have no hesitation in saying, that as the man who is destitute of it is in the broad road to destruction; so also, he that denies it to be the common privilege of christians, is an infidel in principle, and is giving the lie to the positive testimony of the spirit of truth himself. For, saith St Paul, under the plenitude of that divine inspiration which we contend for, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is nonè of his."—Rom. viii. 9.

and whose peculiar office it is to render them effectual to the salvation of those to whom they are preached. These are the principles which characterise the genuine features of Methodism, and which demonstrate its legitimate alliance to the primitive churches of christianity.

With respect to literary accomplishments which, in subordination to the influence of the spirit of God, are undoubtedly of great importance in the ministerial character, it must be confessed that the Methodist preachers are in general, originally, nearly as destitute of these as the apostles themselves were, before their divine master undertook to qualify them for the important work of the ministry. And were it not that the spirit of him who once said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world*," dwells in these men, and works by them, it would be impossible for them to enjoy that testimony of the divine approbation, which is recorded in the evident conversion of thousands, who were previously the willing slaves of sin and Satan, but now are become the children of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and, walking in all his commandments blameless, have learned to adorn the doctrine of God their saviour in all things. These are undeniable facts; and it is upon these facts, and upon the doctrines which gave them birth, that the whole fabric of Methodism stands.—A foundation this, which is firmer than the pillars of heaven and earth, and a superstructure against which the gates of hell shall never prevail.

* Matthew xxviii. 20.

For Methodism is not the religious opinions of a certain sect of people, but *it is the life and power of godliness, demonstrated in the hearts, and exemplified in the lives of its professors.*

Descending from the ministers of the gospel, to the doctrines generally believed and taught among them, we shall find additional cause of thankfulness to the great author of every good and perfect gift, for the general purity and excellence of these. For although there may be some solitary exceptions*, yet, generally speaking, the Methodist doctrines are fundamentally evangelical, agreeable to the testimony of scripture, and therefore well calculated to advance the glory of God in the salvation of men. They embrace the great leading features of the christian religion, as acknowledged at least by the Church of England, viz. The Unity of the Trinity in the Godhead: the universality of the love of God to man: the fall of Adam, and consequent depravity of his offspring: the universal extent of the atonement, and its divine efficacy for the salvation of every soul of man, by whom it is embraced: the necessity of repentance towards God, and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of regeneration, of purity of heart, of restoration to the favour of God, and the recovery of his image in this world. And of a life uniformly devoted to the service of God, under the powerful influence of his holy spirit, as the great agent in the work of salvation. They acknowledge the exclusive mediation of the man Christ Jesus;

* Some of these are subsequently noticed.

they object not to the possible perseverance of the Saints *, but glory in it as their happy privilege, yea, as absolutely necessary and essential to salvation. They believe in the resurrection of the dead: in the day of judgment: in the eternal felicity of the saints: and in the everlasting misery of the damned, whose eternal condemnation they ascribe solely to their obstinate rejection of the sincere offers of salvation made to them in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In short, they believe the scriptures, and interpret them in such a way as appears most agreeable to the analogy of faith, and to the acknowledged attributes of the Deity, whose glorious and unsullied perfections, we are bold to affirm, are truly exhibited, and eminently illustrated by the system of Methodism, as it derived from the pure fountain of revelation. And it must be acknowledged, that these precious and important truths are propagated with a zeal, and enforced with an ardour of affection and energy of language in the Methodist congregations, indicative

* But they deny the uniform infallibility of this. Mr Wesley's opinion upon this point, however, may be worthy of notice. As it is not very generally known, we shall transcribe it as recorded by himself, in his attempt to reconcile his principles with those of Mr Whitfield.—" With regard to the third point, *final perseverence*, I am inclined to believe that there is a state attainable in this life, from which a man *cannot finally fall;* and that he has attained this who can say, " Old things are passed away: all things in me are become new."—*See Whitehead's Life of Wesley*, edit. Dub. Vol. II. p. 168.

of that spiritual life and vigour they are calculated to inspire and impart, and with a degree of success unparalleled in the annals of modern divinity.

Happy is the writer of this in being able with truth to bear this honorable testimony to the general excellence of the Methodist principles, their doctrines, and their practical piety. By a judicious and modest display of these, by the forceable appeal they make to the judgment and conscience of every well-informed mind, the Methodists have at length nearly succeeded in putting to silence the senseless clamour raised against their venerable principles by a mixture of ignorance, rudeness, and impiety. Scarcely any one now ventures to expose the depravity of his heart in vilifying the doctrines and practices of Methodism, except the open and avowed enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the infidel who glories in his shame, and who perhaps labours to sanction that infidelity by the wretched sophistry of modern philosophy*.

But still more happy would he be, were he able

* Some of these *gentlemen* have succeeded the zealous coblers, tinkers, scavengers, and wh——s, who formerly raised such an outcry and persecution (chiefly indeed at the instigation of their betters,) against the religion of Christ, when it first appeared under the name of Methodism in the British dominions. The mob have, however, at length grown ashamed of the impious and servile strife, thousands of them (O! the tender mercy of God!) having become the willing subjects of that grace, and heirs of that salvation they once so madly persecuted! The *trade* is now therefore abandoned to the *gentlemen philosophers* of the day.

upon equally good grounds to say, that the spiritual prosperity of the body of the Methodists in Ireland had uniformly advanced in a proportion adequate to the excellence of their doctrines, and the piety and indefatigable zeal of their ministers. But we are not warranted in the assumption of any such conclusion. Feeling, as the author does, every possible degree of respect and veneration for the genuine piety to be found among his brethern of the Methodist societies, he dares not flatter them with the adulation of falsehood; by ascribing to them a degree of perfection, either in discipline, or in christian experience, which they do not actually possess. The purest gold may become mixed with dross, and the richest wine diluted with water. Even the history of the apostolic age presents us with scarcely a single instance of a church, limited and located as those religious bodies then were, and consequently the more easily superintended, which uniformly exhibited all the fruits of faith, in righteousness, holiness, zealous and ardent love to God and man,—in mature perfection for any considerable length of time. Thus proving to us, that the purest of doctrines, even those proceeding by direct inspiration from the spirit of God, propagated under his peculiar influence, and accompanied by the most excellent discipline, are not always successful in completely eradicating the corrupted principles *, or in

* Our principles teach us, that this is possible with individuals, but our experience shews us, that it is chimerical to expect it universally in large bodies of professing christians.

counteracting the evil propensities of human nature, denominated by St Paul, " the carnal mind which is enmity against God*." How then can we expect to see an uninterrupted stream of spiritual prosperity flow in the numerous and extended Methodist societies in Ireland?

Nay farther, it is to be feared, and probably on good grounds, however unpalatable the important truth may prove, that notwithstanding our great advantages and extraordinary privileges, there is an actual and considerable declension in the life and power of godliness, in the depth of communion with God, in the extent of holiness, in life and conversation; and consequently a decay, instead of an increase of genuine piety; of faith working by love, and of that perfection of christian holiness, which once constituted the glory of Methodist societies. Knowing as we do, that purity of heart, perfect love, casting out tormenting fear, and the uniform and total consecration of body, soul, and spirit, to the possession and service of God, are essential branches of the religion we profess, we may say, How few are the living witnesses of this great salvation? Yet this, and this alone, is true Methodism!—Scarcely can we converse with one of the few surviving veterans in the army of Emanuel, who saw the early days of Methodism, and who has himself successfully fought the good fight of faith; who, in spite of earth and hell, has been hitherto more than conqueror, through him that loved him; but this valiant soldier of Christ

* Rom. viii. 7.

will tell you, with a sigh or a tear, of the decay of piety in our societies, of the want of that holy zeal and ardent love, which characterised the primitive Methodists in this kingdom.

We cannot ascribe these complaints altogether to the weakness or prejudice of those who bear testimony to them. They are every way worthy of credit, and their testimony is unimpeachable; they are also corroborated by other records, as well as by observation and experience, and it is but too clear, that these complaints are generally well founded. To deny them, therefore, would not only be incompatible with that candour and truth which christianity enjoins, but would also place an insurmountable barrier in the way of reformation. Hath not the holy spirit expressly ordained that * the confession of our faults should uniformly precede the hope of forgiveness, and the possibility of a reformation? While an attempt to "dissemble or cloak them before the face of almighty God," is by him esteemed as hypocrisy, and is one of the most formidable impediments we can oppose to the free and copious influx of grace to the hearts of his people. But could we even clear ourselves of the charge of being in any degree a fallen or degenerate people, still we must acknowledge a criminal misimprovement of our precious privileges, and a consequent deficiency in the gifts and graces which should adorn the true spouse of Christ, when blessed as we are with a copious variety of the means of grace. Confessions of this kind are exceedingly

* 1 John i. 9.—James v. 16.

common in our public, as well as private addresses to the throne of grace, to the mercy-seat of heaven; and we cannot suppose they are intended as mere empty compliments to God. They are, doubtless, well-founded in truth, and loudly call for the pruning and cultivating hand of reformation. All this proclaims the great necessity of a general revival of the work of God among us, to which it is the bounden duty of every member in the connexion, be his situation what it may, to contribute his humble share.

Many causes naturally combine to produce a general degeneracy of spiritual life in a religious community, as well as in the hearts of the individuals that compose it. Martin Luther has somewhere observed, that a revival of religion seldom did, and hardly could be expected to continue in vigorous life for above fifty years. He assigns as a cause, the introduction of wealth, and its almost uniform concomitant, the love of riches; which every one knows is the bane, nay the certain destruction of religion. "For," says he, "Religion naturally makes men industrious and careful, and industry and care usually produce wealth, and the possession of wealth too generally begets the love of it, and then farewell to the spirit of humility, self-denial, and dedication of ourselves and all we have to the glory of God." The love of the world, and the love of God, we well know, are as incompatible as light and darkness, as heaven and hell.

Now, men who are influenced by such a spirit as this, are still eligible members of our society, pro-

vided their lives are untainted with any gross acts of immorality, and that they adhere to the external form of discipline established among us. And what is far worse, these are the very men who are most likely to aim at, and to attain a predominating influence in the connexion, and to awe even the preachers into a servile acquiescence with their interested or ambitious views, and these we may be sure are seldom favourable to the simplicity and humility, to the resignation, patience, and love, which are the true ornaments of the church of Christ. Here then is one fertile source of degeneracy, and perhaps of corruption, against which nothing but the special interference of the providence of God can possibly guard us.

It is true, (and thanks be to God for the important fact,) we are not yet overwhelmed by an influx of wealth and power, in every part of the kingdom. Yet we have men of wealth and honour in our societies, who still retain the humble and loving spirit inculcated by the gospel of Christ, and imparted by his grace to their souls. These are indeed ornaments to their profession. But notwithstanding this, men will arise in every part of the kingdom, if they do not already exist, who, with little pretensions either to extraordinary piety, or superior talents, like Deotrephes of old, will prate themselves into some kind of consequence; or, by downright assurance assume a dictatorial influence over their more modest, but incomparably more pious and enlightened brethren*. In a mixed form of church

* It must be confessed that cases of this description, are much

government, such as ours is, possessing, however, a powerful preponderance of democracy, nothing can check the overbearing influence of such men, but the superior wisdom, talents, and fortitude, of the superintendent preachers, whose influence and authority should be exerted in preventing men of this description from obtaining or retaining public offices in the society. The only recommendation to these, should be the spiritual gifts and graces, and the natural or acquired abilities, obviously requisite for the faithful discharge of their respective duties. As far as a preacher sanctions an appointment to office, upon any other grounds than these, whether he bows to the idol of wealth; or labours by a servile complacency, to secure the temporal accommodation of himself and family, or by a timid and irresolute conduct surrenders his authority to those whom he ought to withstand and controul: in either of these cases, he undoubtedly betrays the cause of God into the hands of his enemies, and the consequences of this are not hard to forsee. Not that a preacher should arm himself with an usurped and illegitimate authority: No; but let him with modesty, but firmness; with prudence, but with zeal, maintain and exercise that power, wherewith the great head of the church, and the synod of his brethren have invested him, for the edification of the body of Christ, the church of the living God. Let his zeal be tempered with patience and love, but supported with fortitude and wisdom. Let the dignity of his deportment coincide with the

more prevalent in England than hitherto in Ireland; yet we are not wholly free from them.

importance of his mission; while his genuine humility, and exemplary piety, proclaim him the accredited ambassador of a meek and lowly Saviour. It is to this spirit, and this conduct in our preachers, we must look up, under the blessing of God, for the increasing piety and prosperity of the Methodist societies.

To men who, like our preachers, have their minds enlightened to discern between good and evil, whose sole business it is to study human nature, to discover and expose its blemishes and defects, and to point out and apply the remedy provided for it in the gospel of our salvation,—to these men it is apparent that the difficulty is at least equal to the importance of preserving the members of Christ's spiritual body, from those pollutions that are invariably contracted by a social intercourse with the spirit, the things, and the men of this world. The attractions of its riches, its honours, and its pleasures, are so powerful; the charms of its gratifications, though delusive, are so bewitching to flesh and blood; and we find in ourselves so many advocates for their enjoyments,—that, before we are aware of the danger, we drink the delicious poison, and do not discover until perhaps it is too late, that the fatal draught has palsied our spiritual strength, or expelled the very principles of piety from our hearts. What are we then, but "cumberers of the ground, withered branches, having a name to live, but really dead," in the estimation of him "who searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of the children of

men *." Hence the direful apostacy of many who once bid fair for the kingdom of heaven!

But fertile as these sources of apostacy are, we are not to imagine they are the only ones from which danger is to be apprehended to the church of God. Temptations of every possible kind, beset us on every side. And these are managed and directed by the Prince of Darkness, with all that infernal malice of which he is the true source, and with all the dexterity which five or six thousand years of experience in the arts of seduction has given him. He well knows how to improve all the imperfections of our nature to his own advantage, and to our destruc-

* Here I would beg leave to introduce a few observations extracted from the "Larger Minutes of Conference;" They are the productions of Mr Wesley's pen, and although written many years ago, as descriptive of a great *declension in the power of religion*, in the Methodist Societies in England at that period, they are so applicable to numbers in our day and country, that their insertion here can neither be ill-timed nor unprofitable. It would appear that the endeavours of that great and good man, in conjunction with his zealous and pious fellow-labourers to check the progress of this growing evil, were crowned with success. Blessed be God, the Methodists in England, are at present incomparably more pious, diligent, and zealous, than this document represents them to have been in that day. Mr Wesley observes:

"1st. Personal religion, either toward God or man, is amazingly superficial among us.

"I can but just touch on a few generals. How little faith is there among us? How little communion with God? How little living in heaven, walking in eternity, deadness to every creature? How much love of the world? Desire of pleasure, of ease, of *getting money?* How little brotherly love? What continual

tion. If that subtle spirit, who incessantly goeth about seeking whom he may devour, prevails over the wisdom or integrity of one individual, it is easy for him to make that man an instrument of disunion and seduction to many others, and with him "to divide is to conquer." An union of sentiment, an uniformity of doctrine, and an unanimity of conduct, are essential to the prosperity of the Methodist societies; yea, they are the very sinews of our existence as a religious body. And if ever there was a time when the exigencies of the connexion, temporal or spiritual, more particularly called for the united wisdom and energy of both preachers and

judging one another? What gossipping, evil speaking, tale-bearing? What want of moral honesty? To instance only in one or two particulars. Who does as he would be done by in buying and selling? Particularly in selling horses? Write him a knave that does not."

"2d. Family religion is shamefully wanting, and almost in every branch."

"And the *Methodists* in general will be little better, *till we take quite another course with them.* For what avails *public preaching alone*, though we could preach like angels? We must, yea, every travelling preacher must instruct them *from house to house.* Till this is done, and that in good earnest, the Methodists will be little better than other people."

Such was the zeal and faithfulness of Mr Wesley. And by practising and inforcing these wholesome precepts, a deep and powerful alteration for the better soon appeared among the Methodists in England: and it continues to this day. It is painful to say, that some of the charges here brought forward, are but too applicable to many professors among us, at least in the North of Ireland. But it is better to confess and forsake, than to conceal and retain our faults.

people, that time is now;—now, when the "love of many is waxing cold," when apathy is taking the place of zeal, and lukewarmness supplanting the ardour of love; when piety is evidently in the wane, and when even the finances and resources of the connexion are quite inadequate to meet the increasing expenditure.

For a remedy against the growing and alarming evils, which already impede our prosperity, and even threaten our existence as a lively, spiritual people, we can only look to the united wisdom, piety, and fortitude of the leading men among the preachers and people. These, acting under the gracious influence of the spirit of God, and conscientiously enforcing the practice of that excellent discipline already established in theory among us, are the legitimate sources from whence our deliverance must come. And while, with becoming reverence, the writer of this would bow to the aggregate wisdom of the body, he, at the same time, still claims the right of an individual, to suggest a few observations, which a close attention to the concerns of Methodism, and a lively interest in its welfare and prosperity, have, in a series of years, deeply impressed upon his mind.

It is, indeed, impossible to contemplate without a degree of satisfaction and thankfulness, the union which, notwithstanding our numerous defects, has so long, and so uniformly subsisted among the Methodist societies in Ireland. With the exception of some local dissensions upon points of discipline and economy, to which a religious constitution, founded and

supported as ours is, must ever be liable, and which have occasionally taken place in particular circuits; there has been but one instance of extensive disunion, and which terminated in actual separation*, known among the Methodists of Ireland since the first establishment of those societies in the kingdom.—A great deal of this must unquestionably be attributed to the harmonising influence of that religion, which, we trust, more or less actuates the whole body of Methodists;—A great deal more to the salutary effects of the excellent discipline which unites and cements that body into one aggregate mass, kept in life and vigour by the continual circulation of preachers, which is incessantly bearing a successive variety of talent into every part of the kingdom;—And something is also due to the national character of the people. Though by no means so remarkable

* This solitary instance of dissension, terminating in separation, took place in the *Lisburn* circuit, in the year 1796. It arose entirely out of a dispute between the superintendent preacher and some of the local preachers, the steward, and leaders of the circuit, upon matters of discipline and prerogative. The result was, that the preacher was brought to a trial before the district meeting, and removed from that circuit. But notwithstanding this, about two hundred members left the society; and they brought over some preachers who belonged to the separatists in England, connected with the late Mr Kilham. These still continue in a state of separation, and have lately begun to build a chapel in Lisburn. A branch of them have also extended to Downpatrick, where they have likewise erected a chapel, which, with one they obtained from the old connexion at the time of separation, in the village of Priesthill, near Lisburn, comprehends all their public places of worship in Ireland. That party is not by any means gaining ground in Ireland.

for steadiness or perseverance as either the English or Scotch, the Irish are remarkably affectionate, social, and hospitable. This remark holds particularly in the middle and Southern counties, and in the metropolis.

Perhaps we may be justified in saying, that the prevalence of these dispositions and habits, in some degree obliterates the anxious solicitude which often arises in more phlegmatic constitutions, after peculiar modes of religious worship, and what may be called, the ceremonies of religion. And these may also have a tendency to diminish that commendable zeal which every christian should possess for "the more excellent way," either of serving his God in his individual capacity, or of contributing to the extension and propagation of that religion, which he feels to be the source of life and happiness to his own soul. In these points it is but too evident that the English Methodists have considerably the advantage of the Irish. The zeal, the industry, and the taste for excellency, which animates the bosom of an Englishman, when these qualities are pressed into the service of religion, and supported by his natural and acquired patience and perseverance, gives him a decided advantage over the more warmly affectionate, but less assidious Irishman. Active and vigilant, as well as cautious and prudent, the Englishman yields to no difficulty in the way of attaining the object of his pursuit, while the Irishman is more easily discouraged or diverted from his purpose. He seems often to want the patient and persevering ardour necessary to success.

To this energy of spirit, this national ardour of mind, so eminently conspicuous in the British character, must be ascribed the tenacious jealousy of the Englishman, which recoils at the privation of either his civil or religious liberties. It is the love of these, which, animating his generous bosom, excites the most lively apprehensions, on the slightest appearance of their invasion. In the struggle for freedom and prosperity, the Englishman rises superior to all opposition, surmounts every obstacle, and assumes that decisive and accomplished character, both in civil and religious life, which is no where else to be found, and which justly renders that nation the admiration of the world.

Hence we may trace the astonishing progress which the English nation has made in the arts, in agriculture, in the various branches of science, and, above all, in the power of vital godliness, and what we may justly denominate *the perfection of religion.* Neither labour nor expence are spared in that happy country, to attain to every possible degree of perfection in whatever constitutes the object of their pursuit. The Irish are naturally more easy and contented, though in a state, and under circumstances every way inferior to their eastern neighbours. But this ease is allied to indifference, if not to indolence; and that contentment borders upon apathy. And hence perhaps we may discover one secret source of the unanimity which we so much admire in the Irish Methodists. Though highly desirable and praiseworthy in itself, yet this may be no proof either of the perfection of our system, or of our spiritual pros-

perity. Tranquillity and unanimity may both subsist under the most dangerous circumstances, and even on the very edge of destruction. Instead, therefore, of producing these demi-virtues as proofs of our safety and prosperity, we should rather examine upon what foundation they themselves rest. Should this prove unsound, we shall find ourselves completely deceived by reposing confidence in our ease and contentment, when we are perhaps insensibly approaching to destruction.

A ship's company, while enjoying themselves in their cabins, or reposing in their hammocks, may be profoundly tranquil, and perfectly unanimous both as to the propriety and rectitude of their course, and the ultimate prosperity of the voyage; and if urged to alter that course by a warning of danger, may reply, "We are well as we are; our voyage has hitherto been prosperous, and it would be a tempting of providence to go out of that course; we cannot believe there is any danger at hand." But the pilot, who knows the vessel to be approaching a sunken rock, feels it his duty to save both ship and cargo, though he should, in doing so, disturb the tranquillity and oppose the unanimity of the company. He must apprise them of their danger, and by a dexterous turn of the helm, place them in a state of safety. They can themselves then perceive the danger they have escaped.—Possibly this simile may in some degree illustrate the former and present state of the Methodist connexion in Ireland. If it does so, we may depend upon it, *Jesus is the great pilot of our salvation;* we may safely commit the manage-

ment of our cause to his wisdom and love. But should he find it necessary to shift the helm, let us be patient till we observe the issue. While we are blessed with such a steersman, it does not become us, at every motion of the ship, to cry out, "we are going to the bottom!"

But to drop the figure. Some alteration in our religious economy, appears now to be essential to our future improvement and prosperity. Hitherto, it is admitted a considerable degree of tranquillity as well as unanimity has prevailed in Ireland. This is undoubtedly cause of congratulation and thankfulness; and to make the disturbance of these a primary object, would be to exhibit a spirit totally opposed to the gospel of peace. Rather let us labour to establish them upon a solid and permanent foundation: but in order to this, some improvements appear to be indispensably necessary. If the introduction of these should produce a momentary sensation of debate, let that be conducted in such a spirit as will at once do honor to our profession as christians, and to our feelings as men. Let us shew to the world, that we really possess the religion we boast of; and that our very disputes (if we have any) are conducted in the true spirit of christian love, and with a view not to support our own opinions, but to promote the essential good of the whole Methodist connexion.

Men of sound judgment and deep penetration, and whose means of observation, as well as upright characters, render them competent judges of the state of our connexion, are well persuaded that

there exists at this moment in the connexion the seeds of its dissolution; and that it is become imperiously necessary that some decisive step should be immediately taken, some effectual means adopted to engage and satisfy the wavering minds of many members of the different societies in the kingdom. Our preachers and people both feel, although they may be reluctant to acknowledge, a kind of general damp creeping over the societies, and pervading the minds of individuals, which has very seriously abated the ardour of that zeal, and diminished the warmth of that devotion which originally characterised the Methodist societies. Exceptions to this observation, of course, must be admitted; yet true it is that the love of many is waxing cold, and the present mediums of union are gradually losing their influence, and exposing the connexion to the dangerous consequences of dissensions and separations, and perhaps finally to complete dissolution.

It is true, some of the latent causes, which are now tending to this disastrous issue, may be at present in a great measure concealed from public view, and as their operations must necessarily be located and limited by circumstances, it is no wonder if many of those who are very sensible of their existence, may be unable either to trace them to their true sources, or to prescribe the proper remedy which the exigency of the case appears to require. But frequently the most destructive works of an enemy are carried on by secret sap: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do*?" said the

* Psalms xi. 3.

holy psalmist. If the pillars of our connexion are yielding to the pressure of adverse circumstances, if the bonds of our union are dissolving; and if the foundations of our establishment are now undermining, it is indeed high time to look round for the means of our preservation.

And what let me ask, are the pillars of our connexion,—what the bonds of our union,—what the foundation of our establishment? Examine minutely into the fabric of our constitution as a religious body, and you will find the influence of genuine religion, of the pure and undefiled love of God and man, is the only support of our connexion,—the only cement of our union,—the single prop which sustains the whole weight of our establishment! Hitherto, by an almost miraculous interference of providence, combined with subservient circumstances, that cement has kept the body hanging together. But it must be evident to every thinking mind, that in proportion as that religion abates in the hearts and lives of the people, in the same proportion are the bonds of our society dissolved. And, on the other hand, whatever has a tendency to strengthen and increase that pure and undefiled religion among us, must be the means of confirming our union, and of giving stability and permanency to our whole establishment.

Hitherto we find ourselves assimilated to the primitive churches. The foundation of their establishments was religion in the abstract; and their only bond of union, was the love which that religion inspired. "By this" saith Jesus, "shall all men know

that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another*." So far Methodism filiates itself upon Christ and his apostles; and demonstrates its alliance to the true apostolic church. Love is also the cement of our connexion. But our blessed Lord foreseeing the possible diminution of that love, in the bosoms of his dearest followers, gave them a commandment, which being of an external and visible nature, the observance of it was instituted and ordained as a pledge of their love to himself, and as the testimony of their love to each other. Moreover, he annexed to the due celebration of this illustrious and endearing ritual, the blessings of increasing grace, renewal of spiritual intercourse with himself, and a foretaste of that eternal union and celestial happiness, which all his true followers are entitled to expect through faith in his blood.

To this holy and mysterious ceremony, our adorable Saviour, in commemoration of his death and passion, affixed the mystical term of "eating his flesh and drinking his blood." Expressions which, though evidently figurative, represent the intimate communion and fellowship, which subsists between himself and his living members upon earth, to the end of time; and their absolute and entire dependdance upon his power, his grace, his atoning blood and righteousness; and his all-powerful intercession at the right hand of God on their behalf, for their present and eternal salvation. "Whosoever," saith the Son of God, "eateth my flesh, and drinketh my

* John xiii. 35.

blood, hath everlasting life, and he shall not perish but I will raise him up at the last day *."

St Paul, who was well acquainted with the mind of his divine master on this interesting subject, takes it up as a concern of the highest importance to the welfare of the churches, and while he enforces the absolute necessity of an uniform and worthy reception of this sacred ordinance, he at the same time points out the injurious and destructive consequences of a total neglect, or an unworthy communication of those holy mysteries. For, saith that holy and zealous apostle, "He that eateth and drinketh of that bread and that cup, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of Christ; he eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." And, "for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep†;" being as it would appear from the literal interpretation of these words, punished with sickness, and even temporal death, on account of profaning this holy ordinance. Or if they are to be understood in a spiritual sense, the effects were of a still more dreadful nature, as implying the sickness, stupor, or death of the soul.

But if the Saviour of mankind attached so much importance to the constant and solemn celebration of this blessed testimonial of his dying love to his redeemed people;—if his holy apostles zealously and conscientiously continued in the steady and uniform practice of it;—if St Paul conceived it requisite to

* John vi. 54, &c. † Corinthians xii. 26—30.

spend almost an entire chapter, in one of his best epistles, explaining, commending, and enforcing it, to the church of Corinth; and finally, if the christian churches, in all ages and countries, have scrupulously and zealously obeyed this last solemn injunction of their dying Lord, what shall we say in defence of the Methodist societies in Ireland,—a body of people who profess the greatest degree of love and veneration for the person and doctrines, the precepts and example of their great Redeemer. What shall we say to the well known fact, that this most blessed ordinance is almost totally banished from their societies! What will our English brethren, what will the pious members of other denominations say or think, when informed, that with all our boasted piety and zeal for God, we have just *one man*, who is supposed to be properly qualified, and who alone is permitted, to administer this solemn ordinance to the Methodist societies over the entire extent of the kingdom, at the rate of about once in twelve months, in certain large and populous towns.

But it matters little what other men may think or say of this, the matter rests between God and our souls. The question is, what does the great Head of the Church think of it? Have we reason to believe that it is well pleasing in the sight of our God and Saviour, to see his most solemn commandments treated with neglect or contempt, and his people deprived of that spiritual bread which cometh down from heaven, through the worthy celebration of the holy Eucharist? Let me ask you seriously, is this

really keeping the commands of Christ? Is it actually, and *bona fide*, feeding or starving the flock, the church of the living God, whom his dear son hath purchased with his own blood?

But you reply, "let them go to the church, or to the Dissenter's meeting-house, those places are always open on sacramental occasions; the former to all comers and goers, and the latter, to all the members of their own establishment, who can produce the necessary tokens."—Thank them for their liberality. These benevolent people spread a table you say for strangers and aliens, for wandering sheep, and deserters, as many of our people are from them. But we Methodists have not sufficient charity to spread one for our own children! They may starve, or go begging from door to door if they think proper; but "the communion of the body and blood of Christ," the dearest pledge of their salvation they shall not have from you! No, not one morsel of bread nor one drop of wine, though fainting for lack of it!

But, my brethren, give me leave to ask, who gave you the power and authority to drive these innocent sheep into the arms of Arians and Socinians, infidels and whore-masters, horse-racers, gamblers and cock-fighters, as not a few of the ministers of the present day, are well known to be? You are a preacher of the gospel. In the day when Jesus put these lambs of his flock into your hand, when he made you the instrument of their conversion to himself, or of their further establishment in his grace; did he authorise you to drive them into

the wilderness to pick up a precarious morsel of food, or to perish by the way for lack of it? Or did he rather say unto you, in effect, as unto reclaimed Peter, "If thou lovest me, feed my sheep." But does the due administration of the supper of the Lord, constitute no part of the food of the flock of Christ? And do you think your blessed Lord intended you should keep his commandments, or break them? "O! but you are not ordained!" My brother, if you ask it of the Lord Jesus Christ, he will open your eyes to see what *true ordination* means.

But the Rev. Mr A—— is ordained; the unction of a bishop's hand has been spread upon his consecrated head, and he is of course qualified to administer the elements of the Eucharist. Well, Mr A—— sets out and travels over the kingdom, and annually administers the supper of the Lord, in a most hurried and precipitate manner, (for how can he do otherwise?) to perhaps a third or a fourth part of the Methodists in the kingdom. Give me leave to ask, what does the dear good man put himself to this trouble for? Have you not just told us, that the churches and the meeting-houses are open to the Methodist societies, and by recommending these places, have you not tacitly affirmed, that the sacrament of the Lord's supper is as beneficially administered there, as it could be in the Methodist chapels? Has Mr A—— then any particular qualification for this important work, beyond an ordinary minister of the church or the meeting-house? "Yes; he is pious,—a converted man!" Thank you for the hint:—then a man of piety is

supposed to be better qualified for this sacred office, than one whose life is at continual variance with his profession, although the bishop's hand has been equally suspended over both their heads. Then piety is still acknowledged as the most essential qualification for a minister of Christ.

Let us then here inquire :—Does not the appointment of the pious and reverend Mr A—— to the office of administering the sacrament of the Lord's supper to the Methodists, indicate a general predilection in favour of pious ministers of their own body, to fill that important office. Doubtless it does ; and this is apparent,—First, in the conference, whose authority and approbation are requisite to sanction that appointment. And, secondly, it is equally apparent in the minds and conduct of the people, who not only flock to receive this divine ordinance from his hands, but in numberless instances actually abstain from communicating for many months, until his periodical return furnishes them again with the happy opportunity of receiving the symbols of their Redeemer's love from the hands of his true disciple.

But why this attachment to Mr A——? Evidently for two reasons :—First, because he is justly reputed to be possessed of the life and power of true religion, manifestly displayed in his life and conversation. And, secondly, because though an ordained minister of the established church, he is also a Methodist preacher. These are the circumstances which give weight to his influence, and which have gained him the affections of the people.

It is true the additional circumstance of his ordination may have its weight with persons whose piety is somewhat tinctured with prejudice, or, perhaps, tainted with bigotry; but our knowledge of the degree of wisdom and genuine religion, which pervade the generality of our societies, which influence their hearts, and direct their judgments, compels us to do them the credit of believing, that it is to the two former motives Mr A—— is indebted for the tide of popularity which accompanies his excursions through the Methodist societies.

And is it not meet and right to cherish this disposition in our people? Certainly it is. Its operation is indeed at present necessarily limited to one solitary ambassador of God among us, because there is none other to divide it with him; but we are not from thence to conclude, that the predilection in favour of piety would not extend itself to the entire body of preachers, who, by the wisdom of conference, should be selected for ministering in these holy things. In an enlightened and pious people, influenced by a sincere desire to know and do the will of God in all things, a prejudice like this, which has neither reason nor revelation for its support, cannot long maintain its ground against the united efforts of these powerful advocates for the simplicity of the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us, then, confidently cherish the hope, that the influence of those divine principles, which have determined the conduct of our English brethren in this important point, united to the force of their example, will, by the blessing of providence, soon put us in possession of

our unquestionable and unalienable privileges as a legitimate branch of the true church of God upon earth.

Now, my dear friend, whosoever you are, that has hitherto been the strenuous advocate of exterior ordination, to the utter disparagement and contempt of the true spiritual unction of the Holy Ghost without it, will you prove to me that the same God who ordained Paul the tent-maker, and Peter the fisherman, cannot and will not, now qualify and ordain a true and complete minister in his church, independent of the imposition of a bishop's hands? And as I am aware of the difficulty of this task, I will allow you until the publication of the Second Part of this work, to produce your proofs. In that, if spared to publish it, I trust this argument will be resumed, and more minutely entered into.

But are you aware of the fact, that this injurious system of exclusion may be justly ranked among the chief causes of that declension in the power of vital godliness, and the increase and extent of that spirit of apathy and lukewarmness that is so rapidly creeping over the societies in Ireland? Do you not know by experience, that the Methodists will not be forced (and why should they?) to attend other places of worship, where often they will meet only with unholy ministers, and numerous ungodly communicants, for the reception of the testimonials of their Redeemer's love? No; many of our pious members, especially in the country parts, on this very account conscientiously abstain entirely from the celebration of this ordinance, except only

when they can receive it at the annual visit of Mr A——, while not a few, who are out of the reach of his visits, live in almost total neglect of it. And in this state of things, can we expect the divine blessing upon our connexion? Most certainly not, so long as he holds the reins of government who once said, "Do this in remembrance of me!"

Although it would be difficult at the present moment to ascertain with precision, the feelings of the public mind in the Methodist connexion of Ireland, respecting the administration of Baptism, and the supper of the Lord among them by the hands of their own preachers,—it may however be fairly presumed, that so far as the people are alive to their spiritual interests, they must feel a considerable degree of anxiety for the full enjoyment of their privileges in this respect. But so far as apathy of disposition, or lukewarmness of affection, towards religion prevails, we may expect to meet, at least, a cold indifference to this important object, and in cases where inveterate prejudice exists, we may confidently calculate on a decided and active opposition. Certain it is, however, that there are many warm advocates for the measure in most parts of the kingdom, and of these, not a few are men justly and highly esteemed for their wisdom, as well as piety, and whose rank or office in the connexion, give influence to their characters, and weight to their opinions*.

* At the conference held in Dublin in July 1811, was read a petition and memorial from the members of the Belfast so-

Among the preachers, also, it is pretty well ascertained, that a considerable majority are convinced of the great utility, if not absolute necessity, of the speedy adoption of this plan; and although, from motives of delicacy, *they* do not wish to urge the matter upon the people, yet little or no opposition to it need be feared, either from the distinct piety of individual preachers, or the aggregate wisdom of the conference. But the prejudice of its opposers is rapidly wearing away; and in a very short time we may confidently hope that the same kind providence which has, with equal wisdom and goodness, opened a way for its admission into the English societies, and made it so great a blessing to them, will be graciously pleased to favour the Irish connexion with the same distinguishing mark of his favour and love. Then will one grand cause of our declension in religion be removed, and with it many others would expire also.

Give to the Methodist body the cement of this endearing ritual,—let them enjoy in it the increased benediction of heaven, and we may reasonably

cieties, claiming the privilege of this measure for themselves. It has been since learned, that not the shadow of opposition appeared against it in conference, although *one solitary individual* of that circuit, had transmitted *his* petition against it. The only reason why the request was not then granted, was the want of unanimity in other societies upon the point. But this is probably only suspended for a little season: the people are gradually losing their prejudices against it. As this petition and memorial appears to take a fair view of the subject, the author has procured a copy of it to be annexed to the supplementary part of this work.

expect to see, from this single source, a spring-tide of spiritual prosperity flow in upon our societies. The people will become closer united in that sacred band of christian fellowship, *the communion of saints*; and in that true spirit of love which should ever animate and distinguish the followers of the Lord Jesus. Hence many causes of dissension and disunion would cease; we should feel a greater interest in the general prosperity of our connexion, and more cheerfully contribute to its support. Thus the Methodist churches, throughout all Ireland, should have rest and be edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord*, while keeping his commandments, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, should be multiplied and increased to the end of time.

But those important objects will not be attained without our own endeavours. And to whom should we principally look under God for their accomplishment? To you, my venerable and honoured brethren, preachers of the everlasting gospel. To you appertaineth the honour of restoring our holy religion to her native simplicity, her original innocence, and immaculate purity, among us†. Stripped of those gaudy, yet degrading trappings, which are but the badges of her slavery to a state policy, and rescu-

* Acts ix. 31.

† Let it be observed, it is not by any means intended either here, or in any other part of this work, to insinuate that there are not many pious and excellent members of the church of England; many among both clergy and laity who adorn their profession, both by the experience and practice of true religion. God forbid that we should for a moment dispute the truth of

ed from the lifeless formalities of a politico-religious establishment, let the heaven-born stranger at length visit our humble chapels, in all her transcendent beauty, in all her majestic simplicity! Let

this! But it is plain, these demonstrations of the power of godliness have little connexion with the exterior formalities of the church, and none at all with her wealth and splendour. Neither the ornaments, the dignities, nor the riches of the church, can have any favourable influence upon religion. On the contrary, they are incumbrances and impediments which the son of God, both by precept and example, taught his disciples to avoid, if they wished to possess and exhibit the genuine spirit of his holy religion. A Methodist, therefore, can have no reasonable pretence for laying his neck under this yoke, except that from which we now solicit a deliverance.

It is true indeed, the state has done well to adopt and vindicate the religion of Jesus Christ; we give it full credit for its wisdom and piety in doing so: we rejoice also that the providence of God has thus ordained it: and in return, we feel it no less our inclination than our duty, to give that state our most cordial and zealous support. But let us not mistake the matter; the whole benefit of this connexion results to the state: by adopting and defending the religion of Christ, it has placed itself under the immediate protection of heaven; well knowing, that the divine author of that religion wieldeth the sceptre of the universe; that he "doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." Religion therefore may be necessary to the state, but an union with the state cannot be essential to the prosperity of religion. It has flourished under states which have done their utmost to persecute and extirpate it from the face of the earth. Yet we acknowledge that under a wise and gracious superintending providence, the favour shown the christian religion by the British government, has been attended with the most important and durable advantages; and for these we always desire to testify our gratitude to God, and our fidelity to our good king, and glorious consti-

her expand over our drooping societies the wings of a Saviour's love, and pour into our panting bosoms the streams of his refreshing grace. We will hail with rapture her welcome approach, and joyfully receive from her celestial hand the "cup of salvation." We will open to her our houses, and welcome her to the inmost recesses of our hearts. We will introduce the lovely virgin,—the daughter of the king of saints,—all glorious within, enrobed in the garments of praise, decked with a crown of righteousness, and brightly reflecting her father's glory, to our sons and our daughters; and they also shall become heirs of salvation! Nay, we will invite Jesus himself to our feasts of love, and he will condescend to be our guest, for he hath said, "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*." We will sit down with him at the table of his own divine institution, and

tution. But notwithstanding this, we are bound as christians to declare, that the riches and honours, which have been heaped upon the dignified and benificed clergy, are in our opinion eminently destructive of the simplicity and humility, the self-denial and piety, which characterise the genuine religion of the gospel. And if these are not found in the clergy, from whence are the laity to derive either the precepts or examples requisite to impress them with a lively regard for true religion? From the Methodists, said Mr Wesley! Yes, that excellent man uniformly declared his conviction, that God raised up the Methodists for the very purpose of reviving the spirit of vital godliness in the church. We echo back the sentiment: let the church people come and rekindle the languid flame of their devotion in our chapels; but let not the Methodists be driven back to the churches, for the testimonials of their Redeemer's love.

* Matthew xviii. 20.

listening to the story of his dying love, our hearts shall "burn and melt within us," and tears of grateful love shall overflow our eyes, while he breaks to our hungry souls, the bread of life, and pours into our fainting hearts, the richest wine of his heavenly kingdom! So shall every passion of our souls, every affection of our hearts, testify that we indeed "Do this in remembrance of him, who hath loved us and gave himself for us*!"

* The further consideration of subjects connected with the economy of the Methodist establishment, with instances wherein that branch appears susceptible of improvement, will be resumed at a future part of the work; mean while our attention is claimed to a more minute investigation of some of the doctrines which are closely interwoven with the fabric of Methodism.

CHAP. II.

DOCTRINES OF METHODISM PROVE THEMSELVES GENERALLY GOOD.—WANT OF UNIFORMITY NOTICED.—GENERAL COMPLEXION DECIDEDLY ARMINIAN.—SUMMARY VIEW OF THE PRINCIPLES OF CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM CONTRASTED.—MIXTURE OF CALVINISM ORIGINALLY INTERWOVEN WITH METHODISM.—PROPRIETY OF THIS CONSIDERED.—CORROBORATED BY ST PAUL'S AUTHORITY.—UNHAPPY TENDENCY OF TOO RIGOROUS AN OPPOSITION TO THE PRINCIPLES OF MODERATE CALVINISM.—REVISAL OF OUR PRINCIPLES REQUISITE.—DOCTRINES ESTABLISHED BY MR WESLEY AND MR FLETCHER INADEQUATE TO FIX THE TRUE STANDARD OF METHODISM.

It has been already asserted, that, generally speaking, the doctrines taught and believed in the Methodist societies, are essentially conformable to the genuine principles of the gospel of Christ. Of this we have the testimony of God himself, who hath made them the effectual means of the true conversion and final salvation of thousands, who have lived and died under their influence, and in the enjoyment of that religion which those doctrines inculcate and impress. But notwithstanding this, in some points of no inconsiderable importance, there is unhappily a great want of uniformity among many of the preachers, and to such an extent does this proceed, that it would be extremely difficult, in many cases,

at present to ascertain what are the true principles of Methodism*.

In a general point of view, however, it is certain, that the principles of the Methodist societies are decidedly of an Arminian cast; and they have been gradually assuming more of this character, from the first formation of those societies down to the present day. The apprehensions which the primitive founders of Methodism entertained of the progress of Antinomianism, and their association of that dangerous delusion, with their notions of Calvinism, induced the adoption of high Arminianism, as the only effectual cure of both.

Among the most striking features of those principles which are distinguished as Calvinistic†, we recognise the doctrine which contends for the partial but certain operation of that effective grace, which insures salvation to its favoured objects, styled the Elect, for whom alone, according to this system, Christ shed his blood; and by proposing the infallible perseverance, and final salvation of these, to the exclusion of all others, it appears to sully the glory of the divine attributes, by ascribing to the Deity a partiality, founded upon no acknow-

* Instances of this will be hereafter adduced.

† Although these doctrines have been long distinguished by the name of *Calvinism*; it is not thence to be concluded that John Calvin was either the author or the first propagator of them. Long before his day Augustine, Bishop Hippo in Africa, held and taught many of the doctrines subsequently embraced by Calvin. Their modern advocates, however, suppose they can trace them up to the inspired writings.

ledge a principle, but that of the divine sovereignty; but which is evidently subversive of the well known principles of general equity and universal benevolence, which must be found in all their glorious perfection to reside in the Godhead. And at the same time, these principles appear to countenance an Antinomian practice, by representing the salvation of the elect as absolutely certain, notwithstanding flagrant and enormous breaches of the divine law, and many cases of apparent apostacy, in the hearts and lives of its favoured objects. Nor does the Calvinistic system appear to admit, that complete holiness of heart, and entire and uniform dedication of the body, soul, and substance, to the glory of God, from the prevailing influence of faith working by love, are essential to salvation, or indeed, to be attained in this life.

In direct opposition to these principles, the Arminianism of the Methodists asserts the universal extent of the great atonement to the whole human race: Christ Jesus having by the grace of God, tasted death for every man upon earth; that consequently every man is originally in a salvable state, and fully entitled to an equal participation in the important blessings of redemption. That in consequence of this, a portion of divine grace is communicated to every soul of man, and is intended by the great author of his being, to be the means of his salvation; and which, by a faithful improvement, and diligent cultivation under every dispensation of grace, would infallibly issue in that glorious event. That every man shall be finally rewarded according to his works,

or, as Mr Wesley expresses it, "*secundum merita operum*, as his works deserve or merit." That the grace of God, although in a certain degree influential, is nevertheless not irresistible; but leaves the will free and uncontrouled, to embrace or reject its overtures at the option of the individual.

As a necessary consequence of this, Arminianism teaches that it is in the power of every man, to co-operate with or oppose, to promote or frustrate the gracious designs of heaven towards him; the determining power resting with the will of the man, who thus becomes in fact, the arbiter of his own fate. Methodism, however, is very tenacious of ascribing the glory of our salvation entirely to the free grace of God, through Jesus Christ: while it casts the odium of our damnation, if we finally perish, altogether upon ourselves,—upon the obstinacy and perverseness of our wills, and the direful depravity of our nature. But Calvinists and Methodists usually agree in the fundamental principle of the *fall of man*, and the general consequences of that fall, to the posterity of Adam in their initial state; a large majority of the Methodists coinciding with the Calvinists in the opinion, that sin is propagated in human nature; styled by them *original sin*, and that to this corruption of the fountain is to be ascribed the universal prevalence of sinful propensities and sinful actions, which stamp the character of the human mind in every age and country. And to this also is to be attributed the consequent inability of every man in a state of nature, to reconcile himself to his God, or recover his divine image in the

lapsed powers of his soul. And hence both agree in the great and fundamental truths which are embraced by the doctrine of atonement, viz. redemption in the blood of Christ, and (if the principles laid down by Mr Wesley are to be regarded,) *the imputation of his merits*, as the sole procuring cause of the justification of believers, and of their title to eternal life.

To these general principles, as held by Methodists, must be added, the doctrine of *christian perfection* or *perfect holiness*, consisting in the maturity and perfection of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and of that love which casteth out tormenting fear, without any mixture of sin or sinful desires; the heart being purified by the inspiration of the spirit of God, and the affections permanently set upon things above, and not on things on the earth; and in a corresponding course of life, wholly dedicated to the glory of God and the good of our fellow-creatures. In short, the pure and perfect love of God and man, filling every power and faculty of the soul, and consecrating all our thoughts, words, and works, to the service and praise of God, under the influence of his holy spirit, and in conformity to the precepts of the gospel of Christ.

This glorious doctrine has been amply illustrated and ably supported in the writings of Mr John Wesley*; obtained a masterly vindication and proof from the pen of the venerable Fletcher†, and is supposed

* See his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, &c. &c.

† Particularly in his *Last Check to Antinomianism, or Polemical Essay.* A work, which while it illustrates and maintains

to have been abundantly demonstrated, and happily exemplified, in the actual experience of innumerable living and dying witnesses, who have professed the attainment of this exalted state of holiness, by faith in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.—Those who wish to see this doctrine placed in its proper point of view, and to peruse the arguments which have been adduced in its favour, and the scriptures upon which it rests, will find them amply detailed in the writings of those venerable saints, and able divines, above quoted. Till this is done, it is not fair or generous in any man to condemn the doctrine.

In this important doctrine the Methodists and Calvinists are, and long have been, at complete variance. But the very able statement of its merits and truth by Mr Wesley, and the ample and satifactory vindication and proofs it has derived from the talents of Mr Fletcher, continuing to this day unrefuted, the victory certainly remains with the advocates of *perfect love casting out fear.*

Notwithstanding, however, the fabric of Methodism is avowedly of Arminian structure, yet it is evi-

the doctrine contended for, with the happiest combination of argument and authority; presents us with, perhaps the most accomplished specimen of religious controversy ever written in the English language. In fact the dignified simplicity, the soft persuasive love which shines through every line of this inimitable piece of polemical divinity, appear to contend with the eloquent arguments, for the honour of demonstrating the truth of christian perfection, and we find ourselves unable to withhold our assent from a doctrine whose essential truth and intimate union with christianity, is thus exhibited before our eyes!

dent, even from what has already been said, that there is a leaven of Calvinistic principles, intermixed with its original constitution. But this proceeded no farther than it was supported by the express or implied doctrine of scripture. The same we find running constantly through the writings of the great apostle of the Gentiles. And may we not hence conclude, that these are authorised and sanctioned by the spirit of God? And will not their admission always have a happy tendency to ameliorate the rigid austerity of our high Arminianism? Rendering the more legal and preceptive parts of the gospel, more palatable, and easier of digestion to the spiritual appetite, particularly of the new-born child of God, whose tender minds seems to require the soothing promises of a full and free salvation, to be preached to them for a season, with little mixture of the severer duties inculcated with equal propriety upon the established believer, who may be possibly in danger of making void the law through faith. To the former we should declare, in the sympathetic language of St Paul, "There is now, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." While to the latter we cry out, in the vigorous language of the same apostle, "Leaving, therefore, the first principles of the gospel of Christ, let us go on to perfection," &c. Thus, by a wise and judicious mixture of the principles which may be termed *moderately Calvinistic*, with the severity of our Arminian doctrines, we should represent the religion of Christ, not only with an amiable and engaging aspect, but in her true and legitimate colours. We should invite

and encourage the trembling penitent with greater facility, to lay hold upon the precious promises of salvation; while the veteran believer may be zealously exhorted to a more diligent and faithful perseverance in the paths of holiness, and a steadier conformity to the mind which was in Christ.

Assuredly the rigorous jealousy of many Methodists, against every thing bordering on the nature of what is often invidiously called Calvinism, but which in fact constitutes the true evangelical principles of the gospel of Christ, requires to be tempered at least with some degree of moderation. Many of Mr Wesley's first principles were those, which rigid Arminians now term Calvinistic*. Some of these

* In 1745, one of the queries proposed at conference was, "Does not the truth of the gospel lie very near, both to Calvinism and Antinomianism? Answer, "Indeed it does, as it were within a hair's breadth, so that it is altogether foolish and sinful, because we do not quite agree with either the one or the other, to run from them as far as we can." These were the principles upon which Methodism proceeded, in perhaps its best and brightest days. An appearance of degeneracy in its professors, afterwards induced the hazard of an attempt, which is here styled "foolish and sinful," it was put in practice by the celebrated Minutes of 1770, as the legitimate cure of the then prevailing declension in religion. Then the principles of Methodism first assumed that rigidly Arminian aspect, which has often covered their face, as with a shield of brass, and (as they are sometimes delineated from our pulpits,) has rendered them almost impervious to the heavenly rays of mercy and grace! Indeed, it is cause of thankfulness, that the full sentiments of those Minutes are embraced by few, and promulgated by still fewer of our preachers. Their merits, however, will be inquired into, in the Appendix to this work.

it is to be feared, have been unhappily abandoned as incompatible with Methodism, although constituting genuine branches of christianity. They have been sacrificed, perhaps, to a mistaken zeal for the honour of the law of God, as though the privileges of the gospel were at variance with the precepts of the law! Whereas, if we examine the inspired writings of the great apostle, we shall there find the most exalted privileges of the gospel inseparably united with that steady and faithful obedience, which shews the all-comprising law of love to be written in the true believer's heart; while his soul is united to his living head, by a continued act of unfeigned faith *.

This unhappy prejudice is not confined to the private walks of the society; it has crept into our pulpits, where we sometimes hear a legal harangue upon duties, and obedience to the law, as the medium of a sinner's acceptance with God, with scarce a single allusion to the sacred efficacy of the great atonement, the powerful mediation of Christ, the interest which every penitent sinner has a right to claim in his blood and righteousness; or the promised influence of the spirit of holiness to convert his soul to God. Indeed, happily for us, discourses of this kind are by no means general, or even common among our well informed and enlightened preachers, but they are sufficiently prevalent to cause very serious apprehension and deep regret in the minds of many judicious and pious members of the society; and they

* Rom. viii. 1—4.—1 Tim. i. v.

are so injurious in their effects, that an almost total stagnation of the genuine work of God in the hearts of the people, is the uniform consequence of their introduction !*

The fact seems to be, that our principles want to be revised ; to be more accurately defined, and more steadily fixed. Sometimes we acknowledge we lean too much towards Calvinism ; and then to avoid the rocks of Antinomianism, we vibrate to the extreme of Arminianism, or the borders of Pelagianism ; and every thing bearing the resemblance of Calvinism is now scouted with detestation, as bordering on heresy. And in these alternate vacillations, we drop some of the precious jewels of the gospel, which our intemperate zeal has identified with the dross of heresy and corruption. Nor do we discover our loss, until we see the noxious weeds of Pharisaism springing up in every corner of the Lord's vineyard. Happy would it be, if, with the evangelical accuracy of St

* An instance of this recently occurred immediately under the author's own inspection ; but he was not solitary in seeing and deploring it. One of these most rigidly-legal preachers was lately removed from the circuit where this is written. He is reputed a man of talent, and his zeal for God is as unquestionable as that of the Jews, to which St Paul bears record, Rom. x. 2. Nay, his indefatigable exertions and excessive labours, both in building and preaching, had nearly cost him his life. Yet strange to tell, search has in vain been made for one single instance of the conversion of a sinner to God, as the result of all this zeal and labour ! But the wonder ceases when we learn thatthe substance of this man's preaching was almost uniformly establishing the works of the law as the medium of a sinner's acceptance with God. How then coul dhe be the instrument of leading sinners to

Paul, we could always unite the steadfast fidelity of St James; or, in the memorable words of Mr Fletcher, if we would give to each of the two *gospel axioms* their proper stations, full scope and important action, in the great work of salvation: equally avoiding on the one hand the delusions of the Antinomian, and on the other the pride of the Pharisee. Through this happy medium, the ark of the Lord would safely float to the haven of eternal felicity. In the subsequent parts of this work, we shall endeavour to trace out more minutely some of the evangelical doctrines, which appear to have suffered by our zeal against Calvinism.

Meantime we acknowledge that the doctrines contained in the various theological and experimental writings of Mr Wesley, and corroborated by those of Mr Fletcher, are usually looked up to as the standard of Methodist principles, while the "Rules of Society and Minutes of Conference," constitute the precep-

salvation by faith in the gospel of Christ? Totally impossible! Nay, under him the people lost much of their spiritual life, their zeal, their love to God, and their affection for their preachers. These facts can be proved by a hundred unprejudiced witnesses. And they corroborate the observation a hundred times made, that those preachers whose doctrines are the most truly evangelical, are not only the most acceptable and best beloved, but by far the most profitable and successful ministers. For they exemplify in their lives, the religion they enforce in the pulpit. They both gain the affections of the people, and win souls to Christ. While the stern preachers of the law lose the one and fail in the other. Neither God nor man thanks them for their unwelcome legality!—Specimens of the doctrines here alluded to will be hereafter produced in their proper place.

tive authority, with respect to discipline, by which the body is governed. But as that discipline is, unhappily in many instances, but slackly enforced, so the doctrines found in those writings are sometimes but vaguely defined, and inadequately supported among us. Much and justly as we esteem and venerate the character and writings of Mr Wesley, we pretend not to say they are models of perfection, or altogether free from the blemishes to which human nature, and human compositions, are universally liable. Indeed, if we consider the long period of Mr Wesley's life, the variety of scenes he passed through, the persons and principles which he occasionally had to oppose, and the extent and depth of his religious labours, he must have been more than human, if some cases of discrepance had not occurred in his voluminous writings*. But in all those cases, our judgment must be decided by a comparison of the doubtful points, with those criterions of orthodoxy which we find laid down in the

* For instances of this we may refer :—1st. To his *First and Last Judgment on the Nature of Justifying Faith.* By the first of these, this faith is asserted to be "*a sense of the pardoning love of God.*" By the second, it is said to have *no connexion* with that sense of pardon, (*Myles's Chronology of the Methodists,* 3d edit. p. 24—54.) 2d. His *Concessions to Mr Whitefield,* when attempting a reconciliation of sentiment with that man of God, compared with his *Predestination Calmly Considered.* In the former, Mr Wesley (as the venerable Richard Baxter did before him,) admits election without reprobation; by the latter he is supposed to have *proved it impossible to hold the one without the other.* 3d. His sermon on *The almost Christian,* compared with that entitled, *The more Excellent Way.* Many pious and

oracles of God, and confirmed by the general experience of his children. These are the rules by which Mr Wesley's own judgment was uniformly governed, and as we have access to the same divine sources of truth, so, in all dubious cases, it is equally our privilege and our duty to appeal "to the law and to the testimony."

But the doctrines taught by these venerable men of God, are scattered through a voluminous set of writings, the whole of which can come into the hands of but few persons. Added to which, it must be observed, that the opinions of Mr Wesley himself do not always command that respect even among many of the preachers, which is generally supposed. The writer of this, when urging the authority of the venerable founder of Methodism in support of a point of doctrine, has frequently been told, that Mr Wesley acknowledged "he had sometimes leaned too much towards Calvinism;" and this was made a sufficient plea for rejecting his authority, when oppos-

sensible men, think these two sermons quite incompatible with each other, the terms of salvation being differently laid down in them. These discrepances in Mr Wesley's sentiments are not stated with a view to detract any thing from his truly excellent character, as a sound and orthodox divine, much less to depreciate him in our esteem, as a pious and holy man. But they are cited merely to shew, that we do not suppose him to have had any pretensions to infallibility; and consequently that his opinions can be considered as a standard of Methodism, only so far as they are found in perfect unison with the oracles of inspiration. To his maturest judgment, when distinctly ascertained even on controverted points, we always wish to pay the highest degree of respect; but farther than this we cannot go.

ed to the opinions of the contending party. Hence we are warranted in drawing the conclusion, that however a preacher's mind may be awed into an external conformity to the most popular doctrines of Methodism, every man among them, who is capable of forming opinions of his own (and who that is not, is fit to be a preacher?) will infallibly use at least his mental liberty of conscience in adopting, if he does not publicly and unreservedly avow whatever doctrines are the most congenial to his views of the gospel-plan of salvation.

It is true, indeed, that Mr Wesley, with a degree of zeal and industry which reflects the highest honour upon his talents and his piety, has laboured exceedingly to ascertain and fix the true principles of Methodism. The works which he has left us with this intention are both numerous and well written *. Some of these excellent productions are remarkable for the deep, just, and comprehensive views they take of the doctrines of christianity. Others for the accurate definition, and rich display of experimental religion with which they every where abound. While

* Among these may be enumerated :—1. His *Notes on the Old and New Testaments.* 2. His eight volumes of *Sermons.* 3. His *Appeals.* 4. His *Preservative against Unsettled Notions in Religion.* 5. A tract, entitled *The Principles of a Methodist.* 6. Another, entitled *The Character of a Methodist.* 7. *Predestination Calmly Considered.* 8. His admirable work, entitled *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.* Besides various Minutes of Conferences, and a number of other occasional essays, and numerous abridgments of the works of former eminent divines,

another class, with equal fidelity, delineates and enforces pure morality, combined with practical piety, as essential to salvation. His polemical writings are also remarkable for their general perspicuity of argument, their conclusive and satisfactory proofs, and the noble design, which animates, while it dignifies the subjects of debate. It is every where plain, that while he studies with unabated ardour to maintain his position, the glory of God and the salvation of men are the sole objects he has in view. In short, the candour and impartiality which is the professed characteristic of this work, support the inclinations of the author, while they induce him to say, that if it had been possible for any mere man to have erected, even upon the truth of revelation, a perfect, and unexceptionable system of experimental and practical divinity, Mr Wesley, in conjunction with his fellow-labourers, would have done it. But experience shews us we are not to expect this, until the period arrives, wherein "righteousness shall cover the earth, as the waters the face of the great deep."

Hence it is that, notwithstanding all that has been written and said, with a design to ascertain and determine the true principles of Methodism, they are to this day, in many points of considerable importance, undefined and consequently uncertain; many of the preachers themselves having views widely different upon the same interesting and important subjects. If instances of this discordance in the sentiments of the preachers, are subsequently

adduced, it will be only with a view to the ultimate proposal of a plan for obtaining a greater, if not a more complete unanimity of sentiment among us. "A consummation devoutly to be wished!" *

* Hereafter we shall also have an opportunity of discussing upon principles laid down by Mr Wesley, and the preachers assembled in their first conference, the question, how far a preacher in the Methodist connexion, is bound to submit his judgment upon points of speculative and practical religion, to that of a majority of his brethren? This will be found to be a very material and interesting point, as, on the one hand, we must guard our individual liberty of conscience, and on the other, we must labour to maintain our principles free from the corruption of error.

CHAP. III.

DOCTRINES OF METHODISM MORE FULLY DEVELOPED.—EXAMINATION OF THEIR MERITS.—ORIGINAL SIN.—ITS NATURE, EXTENT, AND CONSEQUENCES.—DIVERSITY OF OPINION RESPECTING THIS.—THE DOCTRINE OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS INVESTIGATED.—SHEWN TO BE A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIANITY.—FIRMLY HELD AND TAUGHT BY MR WESLEY.—ITS LEGITIMATE USE POINTED OUT, AND ABUSES GUARDED AGAINST.

We have already seen the leading principles of Methodism traced out, and have found them consonant to the fundamental doctrines of christianity, both as developed in the oracles of inspiration, and as laid down in the authentic records of the Church of England. But, notwithstanding this apparent and happy coincidence in those essential truths, upon which our hopes of salvation are immediately suspended, there are particular points of doctrine, which, though in some degree of a speculative nature, are nevertheless influential in their effects upon practice, and often form the criterion of christian experience. In some of these the Methodists are supposed to be singular in their views, as they are sometimes accused of being eccentric and visionary in their pretensions. But these accusations are evidently the result either of ignorance or prejudice, and have been repeatedly and fairly met, and effec-

tually confuted by some very able writers in the Methodist connexion *.

To enable us accurately to judge of the general merit of these principles, it may be necessary to take a more minute survey of them, that by comparing them with the established criterions of orthodoxy, we may not be the dupes of popular prejudice, but be enabled to judge impartially for ourselves. And here perhaps it may be requisite to state, that the doctrines of Methodism, so far as they are established and ascertained, are the same in England as in Ireland, and the discipline of both are nearly alike†, although in the important circumstances of administering the sacraments of Baptism, and the supper of the Lord, the English Methodists have outstripped their brethren of Ireland, and are now in all respects, a complete, and legitimate church of God. The doctrines avowed and maintained by this church

* See particularly *Wesley's Appeals, Check's and Fletcher's Polemical Works, Benson's Apology for the Methodist People,* and *Letters to Dr Tatham,* by the same author, and several excellent essays in the *Methodist Magazines.*

† This union of doctrine and discipline, we find avowed in the following extract, from the mutual addresses of the last English and Irish conferences to each other. The Irish conference preceding in point of time, says, "The success of the work of God amongst you, as well as the preservation of your religious privileges, are matters of real joy to us, inasmuch as we are one body, joined together by one spirit, and heirs of one common inheritance in glory, by our Lord Jesus Christ. This sentiment the English conference echos back, and says, "We most cordially wish not only to preserve, but to increase this spirit of union. Union with our great living head, and all his members,

as far as they are susceptible of accurate description, and as they appear scattered through the voluminous writings of their compilers, may be gathered from the following sketch. The Methodists in general believe in the existence of a triune God, whom they worship under the denomination of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To this God, they ascribe absolute perfection of holiness, wisdom, goodness, power, and love. They believe that from the active and communicative nature of his love and goodness, emanated the design of creation, which was accomplished by his power: the divine object in this, being the advancement of his own glory in the extension of happiness to intelligent beings and moral agents. They confess that the perfect prescience of God must have rendered him fully aware of the future fall, and consequent misery of many millions of his intelligent

constitutes, or implies the whole of religion. But our ties of union with you, in and through our common and adorable Saviour, are of the strongest nature, not only as we are ministers of the same everlasting gospel, but as fellow-labourers in the same department of our Lord's vineyard, as we agree not only in the essential but unessential points of our holy religion, and as we love and enforce the same excellent modes of discipline, which our late venerable father in the gospel, was led of God to establish among us. We are therefore determined to act conjointly with you, in the strength of the Lord." This resolution is immediately confirmed by the increase of the Irish members of the legal conference, to eight, with a promise of a farther increase to ten. The legal conference, by deed enrolled in Chancery, consists of one hundred members, ninety of whom are now to be English, and ten Irish. See *Minutes of Conference* for 1813.

offspring, but they do not conceive that this can detract any thing from the consummate goodness of the Deity, inasmuch as that fall was uncontrolled by him, being the result of that free agency with which his wisdom saw it fit to endow his rational offspring. Nor can they ever reconcile to their notions of the divine character, the dismal doctrine of that direful predestination, which would filiate upon the God of love, the designed destruction or torment of his intelligent creatures. But they admit, that God permitted the transgression of our first parents, as the most effectual, and generally beneficial method of securing the honour of his own perfections, and the ultimate happiness of the human race: inasmuch as that transgression opened the way for that incomparable display, and illustrious exertion of all the attributes of the Deity, which took place in the devising and executing the great plan of redemption, by the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

The Methodists believe, that the second person in the trinity of the Godhead, became incarnate, assumed a human body and soul, and lived and died for the redemption of the whole world. They believe that his death was altogether vicarious, piacular,

* This sentiment will be found copiously exhibited, and to most minds satisfactorily proved, in a sermon by Mr Wesley, entitled, *God's Love to Fallen Man*. But, let it be observed, the doctrines contained in that sermon are not universally received by the Methodists. The Author has been told, by a preacher of the gospel, in that connexion, that "*he did not like a bone in its body.*"

and expiatory; fully adequate, and designed of God to be the source of redemption and salvation to every human being. They believe, however, in general, that the fall of Adam produced a total depravity, and moral corruption in his offspring*, and entailed upon them the curse and liability of death, both corporeal and spiritual, and eternal. But they think that this depravity and corruption is, in a great measure counteracted by the infusion of a portion of grace into the human mind. And that every child of man is initially redeemed from the future consequences of Adam's transgression, by the universal extent of the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; by virtue whereof all infants that die in that state are unquestionably entitled to eternal life.

Respecting the salvation or damnation of adults, they believe, that it is the sincere will of God that "all men should come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved."—That, consequently, God hath commanded "all men every where to repent †, and believe the gospel," the glad tidings whereof, he commanded 1800 years ago, should be published to all nations, and to every individual. That wherever these terms of salvation are proposed, as those who embrace and put them in practice shall be saved, so those who reject them shall be damned ‡. They believe that it is the grace and influence of the spirit of God which lead men to repentance, but do not drive

* See this doctrine fully discussed in a subsequent part of this chapter.

‡ Acts, xvii. 30. † Mark, xvi. 15—16.

them to it; and that neither of these act irresistibly, unless it be in the powerful convictions of sin, which usually precede conversion, and are the basis of repentance. They generally esteem *faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the sole condition upon which a man's acceptance with God is suspended; that this faith is indeed the gift of God, but must be exercised by man, and is then only effectual to salvation when it works by love, and by uniting the soul to the Lord Jesus Christ, becomes the medium of restoration to the favour of God, and of the recovery of the divine image in the soul.

They believe, that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*." And in this new birth they include repentance, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins, and dominion over sin and Satan. As the fruit of these, they contend for the indwelling spirit of God, testifying the adoption and sonship of those who are actually thus become the children of God, by faith in the son of his love; with the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, by the inspiration of his holy spirit. And they carry their ideas of holiness so far as to believe, that all sin, root and branch, in desire and practice, must be eradicated from the hearts of believers, as an indispensable qualification for the enjoyment of God in glory; their souls becoming the temples of God are filled with holiness; every disposition and passion being sanctified, and the life uniformly devoted to the glory of their great Redeemer.

* John iii. 3.

Unconditional election and reprobation are equally banished from the Methodist's creed, as totally incompatible with the equity, truth, and goodness of God, although, it must be confessed, Mr Wesley once appeared to acknowledge the former *. Yet they rest the justification of the believer, not upon the *merit of his faith*, but " upon the blood and righteousness of Christ," which, according to Mr Wesley †, is imputed to every believer, for the express purpose of his justification, and as the meritorious cause of his salvation. They believe it is the privilege of every believer to enjoy uninterrupted peace with God, perfect love casting out fear, and a constant, though perhaps not an equal flow of joy unspeakable and full of glory, arising from his present intercourse with God, his personal union with Christ, and his fellowship with the holy spirit, as well as from his well-grounded hope of immortal glory.

They believe the scriptures of truth, to be not only an unerring rule of judgment, in matters of speculative divinity, but also a standard of practice and experience, up to which every christianof the present day must come, if he indulges a well-founded hope of salvation ; that they are not merely a description of what religion was in the days of the apostles,

* His words are, " I do not deny, though I cannot prove it is so, that God hath unconditionally elected some persons to eternal glory." *Whitehead's Life of Wesley*, Dub. edit. Vol. II. p. 168.

† This is also controverted by many in the Methodist connexion.

but a criterion of what it must now be to support that hope. And they believe that this salvation, as it respects every soul of man, at least under the gospel dispensation, is suspended upon, though not meritoriously procured, by that individual's actual perseverance in faith, hope, and love to the end of his christian course. And that his reward in the other world will be apportioned to the degree of those graces which he enjoys and cultivates in the present.

As to the means of obtaining the mercy of God, regeneration, and final salvation,—they think those are clearly pointed out in the written oracles of inspiration, viz. "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you *." Every blessing of the new and everlasting covenant, flowing to us by virtue of the mediation and death, the resurrection and all-prevalent intercession of the Son of God, who is exalted to the right hand of God, as a prince and a saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins, and to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him.

In one word, the Methodists firmly believe, that the righteous are graciously saved by faith, love, and obedience; and the wicked justly damned by unbelief and rebellion,—and that the divine attributes are glorified in both. Heathens they leave to God, assured that he will judge them according to the principles of equity and mercy, and agree-

* Luke, xi. 4.

ably to the terms of salvation proposed to them under their dark and imperfect dispensation *.

* Should it be objected, that the excellency here ascribed to the Methodist doctrines is inconsistent with the deficiency or inaccuracy subsequently attributed to them, and with the aberrations of some of its professors: it is replied, this is by no means the case. In the present state of human knowledge, general and extensive excellence in the deep science of theology must be admitted to be attainable, though we may be comparatively defective in the accuracy of definition upon points purely experimental or even slightly tinctured with unessential errors. Imperfections of this description are at present inseparable from all human compositions, our best theories on abstract divinity being in some measure founded upon hypothesis. Partial defect, therefore, cannot impeach the general truth and excellence of a system of divinity, established upon the plain and essential truths of the gospel. An instance of this occurs in the annals of Methodism, which, while it illustrates the preceding observations, furnishes a competent reply to the present objection. In 1747, Mr Wesley having detected an erroneous principle in his system of doctrines, starts an objection against the abandonment of it, saying, "But we have been exceedingly blessed in preaching this doctrine." To this he replies, "We have been blessed in preaching the great truths of the gospel, although we tacked to them, in the simplicity of our hearts, a proposition which was not true." (See *Myles's Chronology of the Methodists*, 3d. edit. p. 55.) The same may be the case in the present day; and with respect to any imperfections or trivial errors which may have crept into the Methodist doctrines, they are but limited and partial in their operation, and require only to be detected and clearly ascertained, in order to their final expulsion from among us. For we trust it is truth alone that we seek, as the basis of our religious establishment. At the shrine of this holy emanation of the Deity we sacrifice all our prejudices, all our bigotry, and all our errors! Built upon truth, and cemented by faith and love, we trust the cause of Methodism will yet survive the wreck of ages,

This may be ventured upon as a pretty accurate epitome of the principles of the Methodists; at least of what they ought to be, according to the account given of them in their own writings. The triumph of these doctrines, and the of practice they inculcate, over ignorance, bigotry, and sin, has been distinctly marked by the conversion of tens of thousands, from the error of their ways, and eminently illustrated by the useful and happy lives, and glorious deaths, of myriads of their willing votaries. Contemplating therefore, these demonstrations of truth and piety, we must naturally feel ourselves deeply interested in the preservation of our doctrines, and our discipline; that by the purity of the one, and the efficacy of the other, we may continue to adorn the gospel we profess to believe, and to bring forth the fruits of holiness to the end of time.

And now if it should be asked, wherein do the Methodists differ from the members of the Established Church? It is replied: In no part of our theology is there any material difference that we are aware of. But the distinction lies here:— The Methodist, if true to his profession, *practises* what he *believes;* but nine out of ten of the members of the Church of England, who are not Methodists, appear to think this quite unnecessary. They seem to think, if they think at all upon the subject,—

and, like the patriarch's ladder, continue to be the medium of passage from earth to heaven, till the visible heavens and the earth shall be no more.

that to have the true theory of religion printed in their prayer-books, and to hear it occasionally read from the desk, is quite sufficient to answer the purposes of salvation. The sermon comes not into the account, because it seldom ventures to touch upon experimental religion. But the principles of Methodism as above delineated, are precisely those of the Church of England, and it is for an attempted conformity, in heart and life, to these evangelical doctrines, that the Methodists have been stigmatised as enthusiasts, or branded as hypocrites. Whereas, the man who rhymes over his liturgy, without pretending to feel, practice, or even to understand a tenth part of what he hears, is supposed to be the true, sincere, and upright christian! The one "worships God in spirit and in truth;" the other "draws near to God with his lips, while his heart is far from him." To which of these does the character of hypocrite apply, and to whom does the title of a sincere and upright christian belong? Happily for the Methodist God is his judge!

Here then we have at least a general view of the doctrines of Methodism, and it is drawn from those sources, which sufficiently testify its accuracy and precision. But the principal design of this chapter, is to investigate the grounds upon which some of those doctrines rest: to state objections which have been made to them, among the people who generally adopted them, and to endeavour to ascertain, as far as we are capable of it, where the truth actually lies. Should we even fail in this attempt,

still our labour may not be lost, the example may stimulate abler hands to interpose, and the long sought truth at length may appear.

First then, with respect to the doctrine of *Original Sin*, implying the actual propagation of a nature morally corrupt, and positively evil, comprehending complete alienation from God, a prevailing bias and propensity to sin, a direct enmity to the nature of holiness, and an inward association with the powers of darkness, if not an actual participation in a diabolical nature. This corrupt and deeply vitiated nature, and this degrading association, are generally supposed to be providentially imposed, (though involuntarily submitted to,) upon every individual of the human race, as the just and necessary consequence of the original transgression of our first parents, being the essence of the spiritual curse inflicted on them, and entailed on their posterity as part of the punishment due to the primitive breach of the divine law. And to the influence of this is usually ascribed, the universal prevalence of moral evil in the world. This doctrine, we shall find, is not only admitted, but strenuously maintained by the generality of the people called Methodists.

While, however, they contend for its existence as a first principle, they admit that its influence is considerably counteracted, by the infusion of a portion of grace into the human soul, the faithful cultivation of which, it is supposed, would render it an effectual antidote to the original poison of sin, communicated from their great progenitor. But, although this contagion is charged with the

alienation of our souls from God, and the loss of our title to glory; it is nevertheless recognised as a fundamental cause of the death and sufferings of the Son of God, from whence it is evident all our hopes of salvation must now be derived. In this point of view, it must be admitted, that original sin has made some atonement, for the curse it has entailed on the human race; it has laid a foundation for that redemption, which, in its ultimate accomplishment, exalts our nature to a degree of perfection and glory, which it would have in vain sought for, in its original state of purity, and upon the merits of its own personal righteousness alone.

But although this doctrine is generally received in the Methodist connexion, yet it is important to know that this is not universally the case. There are, both among preachers and people, those who cannot reconcile the popular opinions respecting this point, to their notions, either of the wisdom, the goodness, the justice, or the truth of God. For, denying the necessity of the continuance of a corrupt nature, transmitted through the ordinary course of generation, as a foundation of redemption, they contend that this redemption should operate to the extirpation of the principle of evil from our nature, in its initial state; and thereby prove its claim to the glorious title it sustains, and exhibit in infants the full accomplishment of those important objects it is intended to attain. And, under these impressions, the opposers of the doctrine as above delineated say, it is incompatible with the divine wisdom, to permit the actual propagation of sin; for, say they, if God

really wills the salvation of all men, and if holiness be essential to that salvation, can the propagation of a nature positively and actually unholy in the extreme, have any tendency to promote that glorious end? Certainly not. On the contrary, it would be a radical and, in most cases, an effectual opponent to the hopes of salvation.

Nor can they, secondly, reconcile it to the goodness of God; for how, say they, can that comport with infinite goodness, which entails so much and so complete misery upon creatures acknowledged to be personally innocent, as is implied in the forfeiture of the divine favour, the privation of the divine image, and the exposure to omnipotent vengeance? And they are equally at a loss, in the third place, to reconcile this supposed fact with the justice of God; for, considering all mankind in their initial state, as included in the covenant of grace, and consequently as objects of the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, they presume, that the salutary effects of that redemption should instantly extend as far as the deleterious consequences of Adam's transgression; and, arresting the progress of that judgment which virtually came upon all men to condemnation, should operate to the purgation of the souls of infants from the contamination of evil (if it really is susceptible of propagation,) and which must have been by them innocently imbibed. They think, that under a covenant of redemption, all infants have a just claim upon the well-known attributes of the Deity for complete initial salvation: first, as a qualification for eternal glory in those who die in a state of infan-

cy; and, secondly, to enable those who are spared to years of discretion, to stand upon something like even ground against their numerous and powerful enemies. For they suppose it scarcely reconcileable to the justice and equity of the divine government, to permit his intelligent and moral offspring, who are placed in so responsible a situation of probation, to enter upon the stage of their trial, overwhelmed with a nature directly and essentially opposed to the law and nature of God, with a command at the same time imposed, upon the pain of eternal death, to keep that law, and to love, honour, and obey that God, who must, in such a case, be the object of their extreme aversion. Nor do they suppose that the infusion, in some unknown way, of a counteracting principle of grace, partial and uncertain in its effects, any adequate compensation for the destructive consequences which must result from the actual propagation of sin as an active principle in the human soul.

And these persons find it equally difficult to reconcile the popular notions of infantile depravity, to the truth of God. For say they, our blessed Lord hath declared, that children while uncorrupted with acquired evil, and innocent of actual transgression, are the proper subjects and legitimate heirs of his eternal kingdom*, a state and a privilege, which is scarcely compatible with a nature totally alienated from God, and at direct enmity with that law which is a transcript of the divine mind. Nay, our blessed

* Luke xviii. 16—17.

Saviour, has represented little children as patterns of purity, as specimens of that simplicity, innocence, and sincerity*, which are the distinguishing characteristics of that inward kingdom of grace, which he came to establish in the hearts of men, and the essential qualifications for the enjoyment of his kingdom of glory. He scruples not to hold them up as models, in the imitation of which alone, adults could find their preparation for glory also to subsist. And how, say they, can this be reconciled to the possession of a nature, malignant, deceitful, and in close alliance with the Prince of Darkness?

Again; it is said God is deeply concerned in the maintenance, of his own essential glory; this is doubtless a primary object, in all the dispensations both of grace and of providence. But his justice being satisfied in the great atonement, can have no quarrel with the personally innocent offspring of Adam; his goodness therefore would prompt him to erect the display of his glory, not upon the misery, but upon the happiness of his intelligent and moral offspring, who are the objects of his redeeming love. Now the happiness of these creatures must be greatly promoted by the impression of his own lovely image upon their tender minds, while the most direful misery must be the result of the propagation of the image of the devil; and which of these will have the greatest tendency to advance the glory of their Maker and Redeemer, we need not lose our time in inquiring.

* Matthew xviii. 3.

Taking up the question, therefore, in this point of view, our inquiry must not be, whether all the offspring of Adam (being, as we know they are, fallen in him, and thereby having lost their title to eternal life,) do or do not require the interposition of a divine redeemer to restore them to the favour and image of God, and to reconstitute them heirs of eternal glory; for it is most unquestionable that they do. But the question seems now to be, does God withhold from infants or impart to them the full benefit of that redemption? If we assert that he withholds it, then it is incumbent upon us to shew that this is, under all the circumstances, consistent with the proper display of his glorious perfections. Would it not appear incongruous to impart a title to heaven, and withhold the qualifications essentially necessary for its enjoyment? Particularly, when that withholding would appear to eclipse the divine glory in the same proportion, as it would diminish the felicity of the creature, both the title and qualification being equally purchased by the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

Again: some have supposed that neither sin nor holiness are susceptible of propagation*. That human nature and that alone, without any positive and prevailing bias or propensity, either to sin or holiness, is capable of being thus transmitted, but

* It will be readily perceived, that the entire reasoning upon this interesting subject, proceeds upon the hypothesis of the propagation of the human soul in conjunction with the body. It does not appear that the doctrine of original sin could sustain a moment's discussion upon any other foundation than this.

that the entire of man, including every physical and intellectual power, essential to his nature, are propagated. Now, all these are the work of God's right hand; they are, in fact, those things, which, constituting the master-piece of the creation, were originally pronounced of God to be very good; and it does not appear that they have undergone any essential mutation since their creation, save only in the subjection of the body to the influence of pain and death; as the effect of the introduction of moral evil. Nor does it appear that any addition is made to our mental faculties, in the great work of regeneration. That work is carried on, and the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, is excited in, and ingrafted upon the original powers of the mind as we receive them from our progenitors. And hence appears the truly noble structure of the human mind: we see, we feel it is capable of receiving, of loving, and of delighting in God, as the source of our felicity, and the object of our supreme adoration. Finally, these illustrious faculties are given us for the express purpose of glorifying our creator, and enjoying him for ever; and as he himself hath constructed them for, and consecrated them to this most noble of all purposes, it is thereby demonstrated that they are capable of this dedication, who evidence their alliance to the same faculties, which in our first parents were originally devoted to the honour and glory of their creator.

From this view of human nature, as derived from its original stock, it would appear that we are still invested with a natural capacity, for loving, enjoy-

ing, and glorifying God, under the benign influence of his holy spirit, and vivifying grace; while at the same time, it must be confessed that we are liable to prostitute the noblest faculties of the mind, to the basest drudgery of sin. Our minds, in their primary state, are perhaps, equally susceptible of good and bad impressions, and their real character appears to be derived, rather from the principles they inhale, the qualities they imbibe, and the habits they contract, than from the actual propagation of either sin or holiness as abstract qualities, originally interwoven with our nature. Physically good, in a considerable degree, we are certain, our spiritual nature still remains; but upon the present hypothesis, the moral character of man is formed by the dedication of his mental faculties, and the affections of his soul to the practice of holiness, and the enjoyment of God, on the one hand; or to the slavery of sin and the service of Satan, on the other. The principle productive of the first, emanating directly from the source of all good, leads the mind back to the fountain of holiness and felicity; but that which induces the second, proceeding from the father of lies, alienates the soul from God, and absorbs its faculties in the detestable lusts, and impious practices of iniquity. For true it is, that the powers of the soul become enobled and exalted to their highest perfection of glory, by a spiritual intercourse with the Father and with the Son, through the agency of the spirit of holiness; and by a chaste and zealous cultivation of his grace in the heart and life; while, on the other hand, they are sunk into

the lowest state of degradation by the pollution of sin, and their consequent alienation from the source of spiritual life and salvation. In the one case, we are said to be "made partakers of the divine nature,"* in the other, to be sunk into "the image of the devil," who is expressly described as the source of sin in our nature, by the son of God†. Still, however, upon this hypothesis, we see no trace of the actual propagation of either sin in the abstract, or of personal holiness.

Admitting this view of the subject, sin would appear to owe its birth in each individual to a voluntary perversion of the powers and affections of the soul, from the pursuit of holiness and the service of God, to the gratification of sensual desires, and unhallowed pleasures, in direct opposition to the known laws of God. And that this is not the necessary result of a previous disposition to sin, interwoven with our nature, (which might perhaps be pleaded as an apology for the commission of crime,) but rather owing to the influence of temptation exerting itself in opposition to a principle of grace and holiness, implanted in our souls, in conjunction with that light which is expressly said to "enlighten every man that cometh into the world."‡

It is indeed highly probable, that as sin neither adds to, nor diminishes any essential faculty of the mind, so the soul receives no new powers in the article of regeneration. St Paul indeed asserts, that if any man be in Christ, there is in him a new

* 2 Peter, i. 5. † John, viii. 44. ‡ John, i. 9.

creation*, "old things," saith he, "are passed away, behold all things in me are become new!" But this evidently refers to the great and important change, which passes upon the soul in the new birth, whereby the powers of the mind become renewed in the image of God, and consecrated to his service; but this change is evidently of a spiritual and moral, and not of a physical nature. It appears then, that the original faculties of the soul are the same in us that they were in Adam, prior to his transgression. But inasmuch as we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, the powers of our minds are debilitated, our understandings darkened, our judgments warped, and our affections alienated from God, even as were those of our first parents subsequent to their transgression. But upon the present hypothesis the chief blame of this is thrown upon ourselves.

It must be confessed, that whatever reluctance we may manifest towards embracing a sentiment upon a point of doctrine, which may perhaps clash with our earliest prepossessions,—yet there is something amiable and engaging in the aspect of that doctrine, which appears to rescue the divine attributes from the opprobrious charge of permitting an actual propagation of so great an enemy, to God and man, as sin is, under a covenant which includes the promise of salvation from it, to those very persons who are thus rendered its involuntary and innocent victims, without possessing in themselves the power of deliverance. Nay, the subjects of that enemy are in

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

their initial state, unquestionably heirs of salvation. It is indeed difficult to reconcile this with our notions of the purity, the goodness, and the wisdom of God, and our ideas of redemption.

But notwithstanding this, there are many in our societies, who zealously contend for the propagation of sin in human nature*, as having at least an indirect tendency to secure to God the glory of our salvation, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; that the whole of that salvation may thus be derived from, and the honour thereof ascribed to the sacred person and offices of him who hath loved us, and hath given himself for us. But it does not appear that the contrary opinion would in the slightest degree militate against this glorious and important truth; but on the contrary, it rather secures it the more effectually, as it presumes the work of re-

* One of the passages of scripture supposed to support this opinion, and perhaps the strongest to be found in the inspired writings, occurs in Psalms, li. 5. where the royal penitent is found bewailing his fallen state, and complaining, "That he was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him." This certainly demonstrates that David's mother was not an immaculate being, when she conceived him in her womb, and that all the circumstances of his birth were unfavourable to the cultivation of piety in his soul. But it may be questioned if even this text proves the propagation of sin. If a skilful gardener can, by ingrafting, render a crab-tree naturally productive of the richest flavoured apples, cannot God if it pleaseth him, communicate a positively holy nature, even through the medium of a contaminated stock? The case of John the Baptist, would seem to corroborate this idea. He was filled with the holy spirit from his mother's womb.

demption to have its complete effect, both in atoning for, and eradicating the principles of sin (if susceptible of propagation,) from the germ of human nature, and implanting therein the seeds of righteousness and true holiness, thereby qualifying the undoubted heirs of glory (for such are all infants,) for the full enjoyment of that felicity prepared for them in their father's kingdom.

But does not the extensive and almost universal prevalence of moral evil itself demonstrate the propagation of sin? So indeed it is generally supposed, and it is chiefly on this ground that the argument is supported in Mr Wesley's celebrated answer to Doctor Taylor, upon the question of original sin. But this is evidently fallacious; for it is attempting to prove the cause by the effect, which in this case is at least an inconclusive mode of reasoning, because it is evident this effect may have been produced by another cause. The conclusion here assumed is, that because sin hath prevailed over all the posterity of Adam without exception, therefore sin must be, if not a component part of human nature, at least a quality closely attached to, and uniformly transmitted with it. But if the prevalence of sin over an individual or over a multitude, be admitted as a proof of the original corruption of their nature, then it is plain, that both our first parents and the fallen angels must have been created with corrupt natures; for sin hath prevailed over them equally as over the posterity of Adam.

In a question of this nature which involves the dignity of the divine perfections in its solution, if a

choice of causes be presented us, as the source of an acknowledged evil, it is evident that we should select that as the genuine, which has the greatest tendency to relieve the divine attributes, from the shadow of opprobrium being cast upon them. And this circumstance should not only determine our choice, but should also be admitted as a proof that such choice has been correctly made.

Proceeding, then, in our investigation upon this principle, we observe, that the ascription of the universal prevalence of evil to the propagation of sin, as an active principle in our nature, would appear to impeach the equity of the divine government, and to call in question the wisdom and rectitude of the divine nature, inasmuch as the subjects of that evil are the avowed objects of their creator's favour and approbation; neither of which are compatible with a nature totally alienated from God, and at direct enmity with his law. Besides, it must be admitted, that it is both physically and morally possible with God, in perfect unison with the grand plan of redemption, and with the harmony of his attributes; and perhaps incumbent upon his truth and equity, in some way or other, to relieve the posterity of Adam, from the curse of a corrupt nature, if such could be entailed upon them in natural generation. This is demonstrated by matter of fact, viz. in the case of new-born infants, who, dying in that state, are immediately translated into the kingdom of glory, for the enjoyment of which a holy nature is indispensably necessary, and with which they must therefore be invest-

ed *. Hence, unless we are prepared to shew that the propagation of sin, and its consequent increase, has a direct tendency to advance the divine glory and promote the happiness of its subjects,—we shall find ourselves obliged to admit the probability that God hath not permitted this dreadful scourge of original sin, to disgrace his moral government, and destroy his intelligent offspring, born under a covenant of redemption; and consequently we must search for some other cause less dishonourable to the divine attributes, as the prolific source of the moral evil, which prevails in the hearts and lives of mankind.

It has already been observed, that the original powers and passions of the human soul are the workmanship of God, and are all susceptible of de-

* Perhaps there is not a point in the whole science of divinity, that more completely baffles the speculations of its advocates, than that which arises out of this circumstance. The Arminian advocates for the propagation of sin, are compelled to admit the *title* of all infants to eternal life: but then the depraved and corrupt nature they have assigned to those heirs of salvation, unhappily disqualifies them for enjoying the society, and uniting in the employment of that heaven to which they are to be exalted. Ask them when, where, or how infants obtain the *regeneration*, requisite for their admission into the presence of God, and you will find them completely at a loss for a rational answer. They will evade the question by referring it to the omnipotence of God. But let it be expelled when and how it may; or if never expelled at all, still, sin they must have originally wrapped up in the human soul. No doubt, this is done with the laudable design of enhancing the value of redemption and proving the necessity of its extent to every child of man. But if those ob-

dication to his glory; consequently, none of these can be sinful in themselves, however they may be perverted to sinful purposes. But if we examine into the nature of sin, we shall find, that its essence consists in the alienation of the mind and affections from God, (the true source of holiness and happiness,) and in their actual engagement in the pursuit and love of those objects, which are opposed to the law and will of God. And the external breaches of the divine commands, which are consequent upon this state of mind, are the *overt acts* which demonstrate the internal treason of the soul against the moral governor of the universe.

This we find to be the most prevalent state of human nature, and its unhappy effects are augmented by the adverse circumstances in which we are provi-

ects can be equally well attained by admitting a prior operation, of similar effect, in retracing the divine image upon the original stamina of the embrio infant's mind, is it not a preferable, because a simpler, and yet more effectual mode of solving the difficulty? Or if that be denied, it may be demanded, what harm would result from the separation of sin from the physical essence of the soul; and contending for the propagation of that essence (as elsewhere noticed,) free from the contagion of sin. If that freedom is ascribed to the sacred efficacy of redeeming love (as it must infallibly be,) could it cherish the hope of salvation independent of that redemption? Certainly not!

Nor would there be any danger that this state of negative holiness could supersede the merits of Christ, in demanding a title to glory for its possessors,—any more than the innocence of the dove, or the meekness of the lamb, could claim the same privilege for those emblematic animals. Human nature in its holiest estate, can have no claim on the joys of heaven, but through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

dentially involved from the first moment of our entrance into this world of sin and sorrow, until our final departure from it. The first sensations which are excited in us, are the desires of sensual objects, and the attainment of these being requisite to satisfy the first cravings of their respective appetites, we are necessarily led to attach our original ideas of happiness to the gratification of those sensual desires, and hence the affections become insensibly absorbed in terrestrial objects, and in the same degree estranged from the desire and pursuit of those objects, which are spiritual and divine. As we advance in life, temptations and allurements are spread on every side, ready to captivate the expanding affections of the soul, to warp and deceive the judgment, to alienate our hearts from the true sources of intellectual felicity, and to plunge us into the abyss of vice and destruction.

Nor must we forget the insidious and malicious efforts of the grand adversary of God and man, who is so incessantly plotting our destruction, and whose subtility and means of access to the human mind, give him a decided advantage over the imbecility and simplicity of the unsuspicious infant, who thus becomes an easy prey to his infernal machinations. And to these formidable sources of seduction to sin, must be added the force of example, and those defects and errors of education, which powerfully combine to detach the mind from God, and to place its earliest affections upon the transitory and pernicious objects of time and sense. Thus are the noblest faculties of the

soul, (though originally created in the image of God,) and the desires and affections which the God of nature hath implanted in us, as the means of supporting our existence, of propagating our species, and of increasing our present and eternal felicity, unhappily perverted into the sources of our misery, and the means of our destruction.

Now, were we to admit for argument's sake, that children are ushered into this world, with a nature perfectly *neutral* as to any inclination to either good or evil; or even with a nature as deeply impressed with the divine image as was that of our first parents in their primeval state of holiness and felicity; let us ask, are not the numerous sources of seduction, the formidable adversaries, the adverse circumstances, and the subtle temptations to which they are exposed, more than sufficient to subdue the integrity of their imbecile and inexperienced minds? Our reason assures us, that without a miculous interposition, this must inevitably take place. But this argument will be illustrated and confirmed by a striking example:

Behold our first parents! See them created in the glorious image of their God and Father; in the full possession of their great and immortal powers, physical, intellectual and moral; placed at the head of the creation, the most noble, the most dignified, of the new-made works of God;—inexpressibly happy, and blessed with a direct and uninterrupted communion with the glorious author of their existence: in whose complacency and love they rejoiced evermore, with joy unspeakable and full of glory. In this consum-

mate state of felicity, see them warned of approaching danger;—a danger which threatened the annihilation of their happiness, and the destruction of their persons. Wise and potent to resist the first appearance of evil, with every possible inducement to preserve their integrity, and nothing but a momentary sensual gratification, and an idle curiosity to allure them to infidelity, to seduce them to disobedience. See these holy and happy creatures, falling an easy prey to the first attempt of their adversary, to seduce them from their allegiance to the king of heaven! And say, can we be at a loss to account for the easy seduction of their infantile offspring, and their general contamination with evil, without calling in the aid of propagated sin to account for the phenomenon?

Here then we perceive a legitimate cause for the prevalence of evil in the world; and one which completely exonerates the gracious providence of God from the imputation of permitting the universal spread of corruption, by a natural course of generation over the habitable globe, viz. The ignorance, imbecility, and exposure of the helpless offspring of Adam; the culpable inattention of their proper guardians; and the strength, subtlety, and vigilance of their seducers.

It must, however, be admitted, that a considerable portion of the curse denounced against Adam falls upon his posterity; but the principal part of this comes in the shape of what is termed *natural evil.* This includes the sufferings and death of the body, with all the trials, inconveniences, and afflic-

tions inseparable from this probationary state. These are certainly penal in their nature, but they are also salutary in their effects; and, by the divine blessing, they all "work together for good"* to those who are the heirs of salvation. Yea, their "light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."† These afflictions are sanctified of God, and by his wisdom, power, and goodness, consecrated to the very purpose of enhancing the eternal felicity of his redeemed children. Yea, death itself, though the consummation of all temporal evils, and the king of terrors to the wicked, acts a most friendly part towards the heirs of salvation: for it not only relieves them from the burthens of affliction and grief under which they groan in this clay-tenement, but opens the way for that glorious resurrection, which, at the reunion of soul and body, will be the prelude to their final admission to the mansions of eternal felicity: where, at the right hand of their Redeemer, they shall enjoy an uninterrupted fulness of celestial pleasures through the countless ages of a happy eternity.

But it is certain that some degree of spiritual evil also resulted to the posterity of Adam, in consequence of his personal transgression. In this rank we place the melancholy circumstance of our being brought into this world of trial, totally ignorant of our great benefactor and redeemer, "in the knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life,"

* Rom. viii. 28. † 2 Cor iv. 17.

the immediate and necessary consequence of which ignorance, is our alienation from him, who alone is able to satisfy the intense desire we feel after the enjoyment of happiness. A miracle of mercy, combining with the extraordinary care of parents over their offspring, may, in some solitary instances, prevent a total alienation from taking place; but in general the ignorance, the imbecility, and the heedlessness of infancy, leave the innocent offspring of Adam, a prey to the designs of Satan, and the deceitful allurements of sensual delights; while the force of bad examples, and injurious modes of education, confirm the tender minds of our children in their seperation from the true source of peace and happiness. Hence the destruction of millions of those who were originally partakers of the glorious privileges of redemption. Now, it would have been impossible for God, who unites in his own divine nature the perfection of love and compassion, to have permitted intelligent creatures, moral agents, and responsible beings, to have been introduced into such a world as this, under circumstances so adverse to their spiritual and eternal interests, unless they were at least imputatively involved in the condemnation of their original progenitors. So evident is it, that we are the children of fallen parents.

Thus far we may with safety go, and the justice, the equity, and the mercy of God will accompany us. For the permission of these sources of misery presupposes the voluntary subjection of the greater part of mankind to the moral evils (testified by their actions,) to which those natural and spiritual calamities

owed their origin. And as far as relates to those whose infantile state renders them the innocent and involuntary subjects of natural or spiritual evil, the tender mercy of God hath provided an ample remedy for these, in the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; and they dying before the actual contract of personal guilt, or having in their advance to maturity contracted it, and obtaining mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be amply remunerated, by the beneficence of their omnipotent Redeemer in eternity, for their light and momentary afflictions in this vale of tears, and of the shadow of death.

But the propagation of a nature positively and totally evil, bears quite another complexion; and it becomes a matter of serious doubt, whether, under such a deplorable circumstance, any human soul would be susceptible of salvation, by the ordinary means of conversion. For it has been asserted, that if there be not found in every human breast, a principle of spiritual life, ready to co-operate with the converting grace of God, a soul divested of that principle, could not feel either the inclination, or power to cultivate and improve that grace? The ground must be good, and possess a quality congenial to the nature of the seed sown therein, otherwise it will be in vain to sow that seed, however excellent in itself; the birds of the air will devour it, or it will be trodden under foot and destroyed, or choked with thorns and noxious weeds. There is then no hope of the salvation of that man, in whom the grace of God finds nothing to co-operate with its own gracious design. There is no medium of access to the affections, no concurrence of the will, and consequently can be no

conversion. But we have no reason to conclude, that we are left in this hopeless state by the transgression of our first parents, when we know, that the second Adam died to restore us both to the favour and image of our heavenly Father. He has imparted a principle of spiritual life to every soul of man, which is as it were the germ of his future salvation. This principle, co-operating with the showers of divine grace, poured into the heart under the influence of the spirit of God, and fructified by the vivifying beams of the sun of righteousness, sprouts up as a well-planted vine, and bringing forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness and true holiness, terminates in the eternal felicity of its happy subject.

Such are some of the sentiments, and the arguments by which they are supported, relative to the important doctrine of original sin, which exists among both the members and teachers of the Methodist societies in Ireland*. Yet it is highly probable that a considerable majority in the Methodist connexion, entertain very different opinions; believing, perhaps, not only in the actual propagation of sin, as an active principle in the human mind, but also in the moral death of the soul in the sight of God, and

* Although these opinions are related in the author's own words, he by no means gives them as his own sentiments; or pledges himself for their perfect orthodoxy. His object in detailing them, as they have been, in substance, repeated to himself, is merely to draw the attention of his brethren to them, with a view to elicit from their wisdom the final determination and settlement of these contested points of doctrine.

in the consequent inability of every man in a state of nature, though under the common influence of grace, to take any steps towards his own emancipation from the thraldom of sin. And in this sentiment, they think themselves supported, among other passages of scripture, by St Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, wherein he declares, that "God had quickened them who *were dead* in trespasses and sins*; and that they were *by nature* children of wrath even as others, but that God who is rich in mercy, had quickened them, together with Christ, even when they were dead in trespasses," &c. words, which when taken in their literal meaning, would seem to imply both the transmission of a corrupt nature, and complete spiritual death of the soul, till quickened by the mighty power of God, and the energy of his holy spirit.

It remains, therefore, for the wise men, who, by the providence of God, are placed in authority among us, to investigate and decide on this, or whatever other question relative to our doctrines, may be diversely understood in the connexion. Their decision, although it cannot control the private opinions of individuals, may, and for the sake of unanimity, ought to regulate the doctrines publicly taught in our societies. This question is of vital importance, and justly claims a deep and serious discussion. The leading features of it appear to hang on the following points:

1st. Can it comport with the well-known perfections of the divine nature, to permit the propaga-

* Chap. ii. 1—5.

tion of sin, as an active principle in the human soul, which is confessed to be the object of redeeming grace, and the object of divine favour?

2d. Is there a physical and moral possibility of this being prevented, in a lapsed nature, upon the acknowledged principles of redemption?

3d. Are we at liberty to suppose the propagation of the physical essence of soul and body, independent of moral influence: and does scripture, and what we know of natural philosophy, authorise this?

4th. Or may we presume that the forfeited image of God is actually, as well as virtually restored to the redeemed posterity of Adam in the stamina of their existence? We know that the knowledge of God is not susceptible of propagation, but could not the germ of heavenly dispositions be infused into the embrio mind, which in their ultimate expansion, directed by the spirit of holiness, would lead the soul up to their divine source, in holy acts of faith and love? Would this be compatible with the divine plan of redemption, as developed in the oracles of truth;—would it militate against, or co-operate with the acknowledged principles of that redemption?

5th Whether would such infusion, or the popular notion of the propagation of a very contrary nature, have the greatest tendency to advance the glory of the Redeemer, in conjunction with the happiness of the redeemed?

6th. Or are we at liberty to conceive human nature in a kind of neutral state, as at present deriv-

ed; having as it were a negative degree of holiness, innocent with respect to Adam's transgression, redeemed from the spiritual curse denounced against the actual perpetrators of that offence, and although destitute of the divine image (as unsusceptible of propagation,) yet having originally no *direct propensity* to the commission of sin?

7th. As, however, we all appear to admit that a portion of the moral image of God, is still to be discovered in most children; at what period, and by what means, may we suppose this to be communicated?

8th. Is the propagation of a sinful nature absolutely necessary to place each individual within the covenant of redemption? All the posterity of Adam having sinned, if at all, in their first parents, only as it were, seminally and initially; and the redemption from that transgression, and its consequences, having succeeded immediately in the divine councils, and operating prior to the birth of any of the posterity of Adam; upon what principle shall we maintain the expediency, justice, or equity of subjecting them to the curse of a corrupt nature? Can this subjection be requisite to give them *a claim on redemption*, when it is evident that redemption was wrought out for them, long before their actual existence; at which period also their title to its benefits was clearly established?

9th. Inasmuch as we acknowledge that no man is now liable to be punished with eternal death for the sin of Adam, is it just or equitable to sow

the seeds of that eternal death in every human heart?

10th. Considering that neutral state of the human mind, above alluded to (if admitted to exist,) to be *the result* of *redemption*, and its *first* efficient act, and the superaddition of a portion of the divine image, retraced on the embrio mind, as its *second* efficient act; would it, upon these principles, be justly considered heretical, to assert the *gracious purity* of human nature, as propagated under the covenant of redemption?

11th, and lastly: We know that all the natural evils of life, can, by the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, be rendered subservient to the advancement of his glory, in the final increase of the felicity of the objects of redemption: but can the same be said of *moral evil*, and its dismal effects upon the human mind? Assuredly not! Why then so strenuously contend for its universal propagation? Is there not a sufficiency of this direful plague contracted by each individual in the world, through the agency of evil spirits *, and the general cultivation of

* John viii. 44.—Here the wicked Jews are expressly told by Jesus, that *the devil is their father*. As this could not be literally understood, it must imply the derivation of their evil nature, and diabolical dispositions, from that infernal spirit; and as Christ himself has thus traced this evil to its legitimate source, and on another occasion has vindicated the character of infants from the charge of corruption, (See Matthew xviii. 3.) are we justifiable in ascribing the production of evil to any other origin, than our personal intercourse with Satan, strengthened however, and confirmed by the force of habit and example?

sin among mankind, to render every man a fit object for redemption, without having recourse to propagation also, as the more effectual method of spreading the direful contagion? We may ask:—Which of the divine attributes does this glorify?

In a rational investigation of these propositions, and a fair, candid, and unprejudiced reply to them, we may possibly at length arrive at some degree of certainty in our judgment, and accuracy in our definition of original sin. And here, for the present, this question must rest*, while we proceed to advance some observations upon the doctrine of IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Upon this interesting subject also, there is a considerable diversity of opinion in the Methodist connexion. The popular feeling appears to be rather against it, while many pious and judicious persons, both preachers and private members, follow the venerable founder of Methodism†, in adopting and maintaining it as a fundamental principle in the spiritual fabric of christianity, and as the only legitimate foundation of a sinner's acceptance with God, the justification of a believer's person, and of his title to eternal life. And it is pretty clear, notwithstanding the tide of prejudice which runs throughout the general system of Arminianism, against this most com-

* A few additional observations on this subject, will be elicited in the subsequent consideration of the doctrine of Regeneration.

† Mr Wesley's sentiments upon this important doctrine may be found in his sermon on "The Lord our righteousness." *Notes on 2 Peter* i. 1. &c.

fortable doctrine that the advocates of it have scripture, and the opinions of many able and judicious divines in their favour. The opposition* which this glorious doctrine experiences in the Methodist connexion, although founded on neither scripture nor reason, admits of some apology from the motives which induce it. For these good people, who so zealously enter their protest against both the name and the thing, apprehend that the term *imputed* is placed in direct opposition to *implanted*, and that the whole doctrine of the imputation of righteousness, is intended to supersede personal holiness, and has a direct tendency to undermine and destroy the genuine work of grace in the souls of men. But, as these sentiments are founded in error, and in the misconceptions of prejudice, a candid and impartial investigation of the merits of this doctrine, of the basis on which it rests, the authority by which it is supported, and the uses to which it is ordained of God, appear necessary to divest our minds of that prejudice, and enable us duly to appreciate, and thankfully to embrace, this most glorious privilege of the sons of God.

The doctrine of the imputation of the personal righteousness of Christ to a believer in him, rests upon the sovereign wisdom and love of God, who

* This opposition may be partly owing to the general opinion that this is a Calvinistic doctrine. Probably John Calvin held it as well as John Wesley. Calvin also held the efficacy of the atonement, in procuring the reconciliation of true believers to God. Must we reject this also as a Calvinistic sentiment?

hath ordained it as the only medium by which a sinner can find acceptance with him, or a true believer stand justified in his presence. Its basis is laid upon the vicarious character assumed by the Son of God, when he undertook to become the mediator between God and man, and to reconcile the world to himself. Accordingly, it is supported by the truth of God, and declared in the sacred oracles of inspiration; it is indicated by the expressions of redemption, atonement, adoption, purchased possession, &c. and confirmed by the express declaration of the imputation of righteousness, to believers in Christ for their final justification.

The legitimate use of this doctrine is to communicate an indefeasible title to glory, honour, and immortality to those who have no actual righteousness of their own whereon to found a just claim (and no other will the justice of God acknowledge,) to this distinguished felicity. The opposers of this holy and divine doctrine, instead of vindicating their glorious privileges, are doing their utmost to destroy the only foundation upon which a legitimate hope of their own salvation can rest! Happily for them, and for the church of God, his wisdom and goodness have effectually guarded the interests of his redeemed people from this attempt; and completely frustrated this feeble and unnatural blunder of an infatuated prejudice. He graciously continues to accept us upon the imputed merits of his only begotten Son.

Revelation, reason, and the ample testimony of innumerable divines and commentators, combine

with the experience of the children of God, to establish the doctrine of imputed righteousness ; but it will be necessary to enter more minutely into the arguments, and to adduce the authorities which support the assertions here made*.

This is that glorious plan of salvation, which the wisdom of God devised, and his power and goodness carried into execution, for uniting his own glory with the felicity of his redeemed children. It will be evident to the most cursory observer, that the basis of this plan is the vicarious system of substitution and imputation. Jesus was the substituted victim, who was accepted by the justice of God, as the expiatory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; which were imputed to him, which he bore in his own body on the cross †, and which operating to the condemnation of his innocent person, to the punishment of death, enabled the justice and mercy of God, to unite in the forgiveness of our sins, and in the imputation of his Son's personal righteousness

* Many other points of divinity may be variously understood and differently explained, with little injury to the fundamental principles of the gospel, and without affecting the great fabric of redemption; but this important doctrine, being the foundation of our hopes, must be clearly established, and distinctly understood. From a conviction of this, and feeling himself so ably supported, the author has ventured on a more decisive style of argument here, than he chose to make use of on more dubious, and less important topics. And although he pretends not to absolute perfection in a logical display of his arguments, yet he trusts their solidity will be accepted as some atonement for the absence of some of the embellishments of composition.

† 1 Peter ii. 24.

to every true believer, for his justification unto eternal life, and for his claim upon the reward of everlasting felicity.

Before we enter upon our scriptural or collateral proofs of this point of doctrine, it may be well to observe how far it is supported even by reason itself; for although the comparative imbecility of this power, and its inadequacy to a full comprehension of some of the mysteries of revelation, is readily acknowledged; yet it is capable of corroborating by its testimony many important points, in the doctrines which proclaim to lost sinners the glad tidings of a full, free, and perfect salvation, purchased for them by the precious blood of Christ Jesus, and imparted by his holy spirit to the souls of his redeemed people.

And, first, it is evident that if a sinner be accepted of God, pardoned, justified, entitled to eternal life, and actually received into the joys of the blessed heirs of glory, this great salvation must be accomplished upon such principles as will harmonise with all the attributes of the Deity. For we are not to suppose, that God will save any man through his mere mercy, at the expence either of his truth or justice.

Hence it follows, that every candidate for immortal glory, if he wishes to give success to his claim, must bring it forward furnished with every requisite qualification for a legal, as well as an evangelical title, to the reward of eternal life. And here we must revert to the original covenant into which God entered with man; to the complete

fulfilment of which, was attached the promise of eternal felicity *. For as God is unchangeable in his nature, so he must continue to demand the fulfilment of the original contract, as the indispensable condition of his bestowing the promised reward. Now a happy immortality was the reward suspended upon the perfect obedience of our first parents, perfect

* It is acknowledged there is no specific and positive declaration of the terms of this covenant, contained in a detailed form in the holy scriptures. But the annexation of the penalty of death to the breach of the divine command, taken in conjunction with the immutability and goodness of God, is a sufficient indication of his gracious design, to impart both eternal life and eternal happiness as the reward of the fidelity of his intelligent offspring. When God said "In the day wherein thou breakest my command thou shalt surely die," he said also in effect, "If thou keep my commandment, thou shalt live for ever." But let it be carefully observed, that in the utmost fidelity which man could have exhibited in his love and obedience to God, he would have done no more than his duty. And it is highly probable, that the mere continuation of the felicity he then enjoyed, would, upon the soundest principles of equity, have been a full compensation, an adequate reward, for his faithful perseverance. Hence, if the terms of that covenant were strictly legal, as they most likely were, it does not appear that our first parents could ever have had any just claim upon God for an increase of their felicity, or an exaltation to a higher rank in the scale of intellectual beings. We know not, therefore, upon what foundation the common opinion rests, that the fidelity of our primitive ancestors would have been rewarded with their ultimate translation to heaven, and the exchange of a material and vulnerable body, for a spiritual and immortal vehicle. Is it not highly probable that this glorious felicity which we know to be now the privilege of the sons of God, owes its first existence entirely to the redemption that is in Jesus Christ?

obedience must therefore be somewhere found in human nature, as the foundation of our claim upon the reward of eternal felicity, but not having this in ourselves, it is evident we must look for it in some eligible substitute, or otherwise for ever forfeit all pretensions to the promised reward.

For the immutable God with whom we have to do, will never abate a single iota of the perfect obedience, which his righteous law demands as the condition upon which the reward of eternal life is suspended. But if this obedience be found in a state of absolute perfection, in any one branch of human nature; and even in such a redundancy, as to atone to the righteous God for all the breaches thereof found in every other branch, then it is plain, that in the imputation of the merits of that obedience, the persons and characters of the transgressors, may meet with a legal justification. And this we find to be precisely the case with the believer in Jesus. God hath acknowledged Christ as the federal head and representative of the whole human race, and hath accepted his perfect obedience, as a compensation to his offended justice, for the transgressions of all mankind; and imputing the merit of that obedience to every believer, they thereby obtain a title, legal in its nature, but evangelical in its operation, to the inheritance of eternal glory.

But farther: the future reward of the redeemed saints of God, is not limited to the mere possession of eternal existence, although in a state of supreme felicity. That reward is not only endless in its duration, but it is also transcendent in its glory, infinite

in its dignity, and God-like in its excellence*. Now, this "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," is expressly designated by St Paul, as our *purchased possession*†, and if purchased, then an equivalent value must have been paid for it. And what must it have been? Holy, spiritual, and divine, it could be no other than the most immaculate, perfect, and meritorious righteousness, wrought out in a state of trial, by our surety. Let those, therefore, who reject the imputation of their redeemer's righteousness, calculate the value of this inheritance; let them estimate thereby their own personal righteousness, and then let them say, where rests their title, and upon what foundation will they erect their claim to this vast and eternal weight of glory?

Will they say, they rest their hopes upon the mercy, the love, and the promises of God? It is granted all these are pledged as the security of their inhe-

* "Father (saith the blessed Jesus,) I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. *And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one even as we are one.*"—John, xvii. 22. 24.

St Paul saith, "But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, *are changed into the same image*, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."—2 Cor. iii. 18.

St John adds, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is."—1 Ep. John iii. 2.

† Ephes. i. 14.

ritance! But, do these divine attributes flow spontaneously to us; do they convey the blessings of salvation through the merits of no mediator; and have we in ourselves a legitimate claim upon their invaluable treasures, and the rich blessings they bestow? If so, we may indeed venture to reject the imputed merits of our adorable Redeemer, as beneath our notice; but if those merits are the foundation upon which the promises of salvation rest, if the benign attributes of the Deity are rendered propitious by their infinite value, and if they constitute the only medium through which salvation finds its way to our hearts, then it concerns us deeply to inquire how far we are safe in rejecting the gracious proposals of our God, when he promises to impute to us, as the source of our felicity, the infinite merits of the son of his love.

Again: God, as the uncontrolled sovereign of the universe, might, unquestionably, if it had pleased him, have extended the riches of his grace, the plenitude of his mercy, and the important blessings of salvation to mankind, unconnected with terms or conditions, and perhaps without any mediator.

But this is not the plan which his wisdom hath chosen to adopt. He has now connected the glory of his divine attributes with the salvation of mankind, through the person and offices of his well-beloved son. And whatever he might have done as the sovereign of the universe, yet, as its moral governor, it became requisite, in vindication of his righteous judgment, to govern the operation of his mercy and love, by the exercise of his equity

and justice. Hence we find the favours of heaven are not indiscriminately poured out upon all mankind, but extended only to those who are qualified and entitled to receive them, upon the terms which the wisdom and goodness of God hath ordained as the medium of their communication.

Upon these principles, it is evident that God, as the righteous judge of the world, can admit no man to the enjoyment of eternal life, but him who possesseth such a title as both his justice and his truth can sanction and confirm. And that title, as it respects the posterity of Adam, must be at least a perfect obedience, and full conformity to the law*. And we may rely upon it, that no human being ever will inherit eternal life, but that person, who, either in his own character or in an eligible and accepted substitute, can shew such a title as is adequate to sustain the scrutiny of the divine law. Just as soon might a lamb or a dove, if susceptible of ratiocination, contend for the blessing of eternal felicity, upon

* Observe the terms of salvation laid down in Rom. ii. 5, 6, 7, 13. "In the righteous judgment of God, he will render to every man according to his deeds. To them who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; eternal life. Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil: but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good." Hence we perceive that the moral law is not abrogated. For still, notwithstanding the fall of Adam, if any man can be found who hath fulfilled its divine precepts, he shall be justified thereby. Let him make good his claim, and God will infallibly reward his fidelity with everlasting life. And although the law is now superseded in its office of justification, as it respects us individually, by the ope-

the merits of their good dispositions, and harmless lives, as a man could lay claim to salvation without a well-founded and meritorious title. And such a title, it is plain, can only be found in the merits of a crucified Saviour, whose righteousness, therefore, must be imputed to a believer, as the only possible means of his inheriting eternal life, upon the principles of equity and truth.

Why then, we may ask, are so many pious persons fond of ascribing their salvation solely to the mercy and love of God? Chiefly because of their inattention to the plan of salvation, laid down in the scriptures of truth. They feel that mercy and love are the only attributes, with which they have any direct intercourse, and hence they lose sight of the justice which is satisfied in the person of their Redeemer; and of the truth and equity which now recognise and confirm upon that justice, their indefeasible claim on the beneficence of their covenant God, for the

ration of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; yet still the satisfaction of the penal demands of the law, and the *fulfilment of its precepts*, are the firm foundations upon which we claim salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ: and it is upon this ground, and upon this alone, that faith in him is rendered efficacious for our salvation, upon principles of *equity* and *justice*, as well as *mercy* and *love*. Had Jesus not fulfilled the law in our stead, faith in him could have given us no title to heaven, nor should we have had the privilege of exercising it. But now faith apprehends his righteous obedience, transfers the merits of that obedience to our souls, and thus gives us a fundamental and permanent claim, on the justice, as well as mercy of God, for our salvation. But this can only be done by the imputation of the personal righteousness of our Redeemer to us.

reward of eternal life, due to personal obedience of their Redeemer, and transferred to them in the act of believing on him with the heart unto righteousness.

But, though the redeemed children of God may occasionally forget the terms on which their salvation has been purchased, yet Jesus forgets not the day when he trod the wine-press alone, and poured out his soul as an offering for their sins; when he was numbered with the transgressors, and surrendered his immaculate life, as the atoning sacrifice for the iniquities of us all. Nor can he forget, that as his sacrificial and expiatory death, atoned to the justice of God for our aggravated transgressions; so his transcendently meritorious life purchased for every true believer a clear and indubitable title to glory, honour, and immortality *.

We know that the boundless mercy and unmerited love of God laid the first foundation of our redemption; these were the primary causes of its ultimate accomplishment. But it is plain, that the

* We are justified in taking this comprehensive view of the mediation of Christ. Like a majestic stream, it divides its waters into two distinct branches, wherewith it embraces, as it were, both sides of our fallen nature. One the one hand, it washes away in its piacular efficacy, the stains of our guilt; and on the other, by its healing virtues, it renovates our nature, purifies our hearts, and fructifies our redeemed souls with its enlivening graces. And finally uniting its redeeming and regenerating powers, in one grand stream of salvation, bears our happy souls on its triumphant bosom, to the inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and purchased by his own most precious blood.

only proper objects of mercy are guilt and misery. From the first of these we are are delivered in the day when God speaks peace to our souls, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. And from the second, when the power of sin is broken, when our hearts are regenerated, and our captive souls emancipated from the bondage of sin, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. In this happy renovation of our nature, we obtain a joyful liberation from both guilt and misery. This is, indeed, a necessary prelude to our eternal redemption, a qualification indispensably requisite to the enjoyment of the kingdom of God. But yet it is clear our title to that glorious inheritance cannot be found in either of these invaluable blessings.

The pardon of my sins absolves me from guilt, and rescues me from punishment; but it is evident that mere pardon can do nothing more. And the renovation of my nature, be it ever so perfect, is a blessing which I derive from the grace of God, through faith in his Son; consequently it forms no meritorious ground, on which my claim to eternal life can repose. If, therefore, neither the pardon of my sin, nor the sanctification of my nature will give me a title to glory, it is plain I can have no prospect of finding that title in myself, unless it be in my good works subsequent to justification. But these are so defective, that they cannot themselves find acceptance with God, until sprinkled with the atoning blood of Christ. It is therefore evident that my title cannot be derived from this source: it remains, then, that I must look for it elsewhere;

and I find it established by divine authority, in the blood and righteousness of my all-sufficient and complete Redeemer: the merits of which are imputed to me, the moment I believe in him with my heart unto righteousness.

Here then I rest my humble claim: and were I as guilty, as miserable, and as polluted as the dying thief, whom Jesus bore from Calvary to Paradise, here I would still rest my humble claim; and be it known to the whole world, that this man's title to eternal felicity, is as secure, as firm, and as amply supported, by the truth, the justice, and the love of God, as are those of Enoch, Elijah, Daniel, or Paul: Equally recognised, equally defended by the attributes of the Deity: because each rests upon the same immutable basis, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, as the source of their justification and appointment unto eternal life*. And the title of that poor, redeemed, dying criminal, to the celestial

* The doctrine here inculcated, must not be supposed to militate against the well-proportioned rewards, promised to the faithful and laborious servants of God. No,—we well know that "As one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead." The exalted characters above-mentioned, will shine as stars of the first magnitude, in the kingdom of glory for ever and ever. But the dying penitent thief, being washed from his sins in the blood of the lamb, enjoys a felicity as permanent, and a salvation as secure, as that of the holiest saint that ever trod the path of piety, to the realms of eternal felicity; his title being, like theirs, founded upon the imputed merits of his divine Redeemer; for assuredly *he had none of his own. But without adequate merit their is no salvation to be obtained from a God of truth and justice.*

joys of eternity, stands unimpeached by the iniquity and injustice of a life, spent almost to its latest breath, in the service of sin, and the drudgery of Satan. Was it to establish the glorious doctrine of the imputation of his Son's righteousness to true believers, beyond the possibility of a cavil, that God hath condescended to exemplify and illustrate it by an instance, which, while it flashes conviction to our hearts, almost confounds our understandings with its stupendous mercy? It proclaims in language not to be mistaken, the truth of the doctrine for which we contend, as for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Upon this foundation the title of the meanest saint upon earth, to his eternal inheritance, cannot be impeached without manifest injustice, done not only to its possessor, but also to its glorious author. And hence the God of justice, who vindicates the rights of his Son*, and defends the claims of his redeemed people†, is the legitimate guardian of their salvation. United to Christ as their living head, they, as his living members, become personally interested in all that he has done and suffered; which, in the estimation of God, is placed to the credit of their account, as if personally performed by themselves. Nay farther: so close and intimate is the blessed union which subsists between our adorable Redeemer and his spiritual members, and so inseparable their community of interests, that, in the emphatic language of St Paul, they are almost identified as one

* Hebrews, i. 13. † Rom. viii. 31. 34.

person. For he saith*, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit;" and again, "Now are ye the body of Christ, and members in particular;" and again, "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and his bones." Illustrating this ineffable union, by comparing it with the marriage-contract, which yet is but a feeble emblem of its transcendent glory. From all which it is evident, that, as the members of the body are interested in the benefit arising from the wisdom of the head and the affections of the heart, and the wife entitled to participate in the wealth and prosperity of her husband, so also are the members of Christ's mystical body, his bride and spouse, personally interested in his meritorious life, as well as his atoning death; but this can only be by the imputation of those merits to their persons and characters.

Finding then, that even our reason teaches us, upon the soundest principles of human wisdom, to admit the doctrine of imputed righteousness, as necessary to render us acceptable to a God of infinite purity and holiness; let us now proceed to investigate some of the scriptural and collateral proofs which support and vindicate this glorious privilege of the children of God. For as the doctrine of the imputation of the personal righteousness of Christ to believers, is fundamentally important; it demands our most serious investigation, our most diligent research, our impartial and unequivocal decision.

The questions connected with it are,—First, Is it true? Secondly. "If true, what is its proper and le-

* See 1 Cor. vi. 17.—xi. 12. 27.—Ephes. v. 30.

gitimate use? Thirdly, What are the abuses to which it is liable, and how are these to be guarded against? After a brief reply to these questions, upon scriptural and derived authority, we may answer some objections, and glance at a few of the inevitable and dangerous consequences which must result from the rejection of this fundamental doctrine.

That the doctrine is true appears not only from what has already been advanced, but also from the vicarious character assumed by our blessed Redeemer, as exhibited and confirmed by the following and similar passages of scripture. In Jeremiah, xxiii. 6. Christ is expressly styled, "*The Lord our righteousness*;" words, the natural import of which is, that those who are united to Jesus by faith, are personally represented by him, and interested in the merits of his righteousness, which becomes theirs by imputation. And again, in 1 Corinthians, i. 30. he is declared to be "made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" all these being imputed to believers, in the glorious perfection in which they are found in their living head, and imparted to them in the degrees suited to the limitation of their capacities in receiving them. These are the things which alone can sanction, nay demand, upon their adequate merit, the justification of a character before God; but to do this, they must be found in absolute perfection. In angels, and in our first parents prior to the fall, they were found perfect, agreeable to the station they filled in the scale of intelligent and responsible beings; and, ac-

cordingly, their justification rested upon their own personal righteousness.—But in fallen man this is totally impossible ; therefore, his justification must rest upon the interest he has in the character and virtues of his great federal head and representative, imputed to him by a righteous God.

Again, St Paul in his epistles to the Romans, (chap. iv. 11. 24.) positively and expressly asserts the imputation of righteousness to believers in Christ, without the deeds of the law : and in chap. iii. 22. he maintains that " the righteousness of God," viz. God our Saviour, Christ Jesus, "is unto all (the word imputed being understood in the ellipsis,) as well as " upon all them that believe." And again, in 2 Cor. v. 21. " For God hath made him (Christ,) who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Here the doctrine of the imputation of the sins of men to the person of Christ, and the imputation of his righteousness to them, is established by the strongest and most decisive words which could be selected for the purpose. Christ being made sin for us, evidently implies his bearing our sins in his own body on the cross, receiving the penalty, and suffering the death due to our crimes, the guilt of them being imputed to him, though personally innocent of them. So, in like manner, our being made the righteousness of God in him, implies our personal union with him, our interest in the merit of his righteousness, our title to the inheritance of the reward due to his obedience, to his active and passive righteousness, as well as our redemption from the curse of a broken

law, by his vicarious sufferings and death. So are the merits of that righteousness which we never performed, imputed to us, and the blessings consequent upon it descend in rich abundance upon our hearts, while the curse of our disobedience and unrighteousness, is transferred by the same righteous judge, to the innocent victim who died in our stead. Again, (Rom. v. 18. 19.) "Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous;" that is, first esteemed so by imputation, and then constituted such by grace and holiness.

Here, then, once for all, the doctrine is as clearly defined, and as positively declared, as it is possible for language to do. From these passages of scripture the truth of the doctrine appears to be sufficiently established; it is therefore unnecessary to cite any more at present. But if the sacred records of inspiration are carefully searched, this doctrine will be found to have formed the basis of the Mosaical institutions, by the sacrifices, rites, and ceremonies of which it was evidently pointed out, and eminently illustrated; while the prophets continually allude to it in their inspired predictions, and David frequently celebrates it in the Psalms. And finally, it is established by the apostles, and confirmed by the experience of the children of God, in all ages and in every country.

But the doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to believers for their justification, is also a fundamental principle of the Church of England. This clearly appears by the following extracts from her Articles and Homilies:

"We are accounted righteous before God, only for "the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by "faith, and not for our own works or deservings. "Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is "a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of com- "fort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of "Justification."—(Article xi.)

"So that the grace of God doth not shut out the "*justice* or righteousness of God in our justification, "but only shutteth out the righteousness of man, "as to deserving our justification."

"And therefore St Paul declareth nothing on the "behalf of man, concerning his justification, but "only a true faith."

"And yet that faith doth not shut out repenatnce, "hope, love, to be joined with faith (that is after- "wards; see below,) in every man that is justified; "neither doth faith shut out the righteousness of "our good works, necessarily to be done afterwards. "But it excludeth them so, that we may not do them "to this intent, to be made just (or to be justified,) "by doing them."

"That we are *justified by faith alone* is spoken, "to take away clearly all merit of our works, and "wholly to ascribe the *merit and deserving* of our "justification unto Christ alone."

"The true meaning of this saying, "We be jus-

"tified by faith only," is this, We be justified by the *merits* of Christ only, and not of our own works."

"I can shew a man, that by faith without works, "lived and came to heaven. But without faith ne- "ver man had life. The thief on the cross only "believed, and the most merciful God justified him. "Truth it is, if he had lived and not regarded faith "and the works thereof, he should have lost his sal- "vation again. But this I say, faith by itself saved "him. But works by themselves never justified "any man."—(See Homilies on Salvation and Justification.)

But it is also admitted, proved, and illustrated, by the late Rev. John Wesley, in many parts of his voluminous writings, but perhaps in none more explicitly than in his sermon upon Jeremiah, xxiii. 6*, "This is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness." This sermon was written expressly on the subject under discussion, and in it the venerable author vindicates himself from the false accusation of having renounced the doctrine it contains. Herein he repeats and confirms what he had before both taught and wrote, viz. "If we take the phrase of imputing Christ's righteousness, for the bestowing (as it were,) the righteousness of Christ, including his obedience, as well passive as active, in the return of it; that is, in the privileges, blessings, and benefits, purchased by it; so a believer may be said to be justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him."

* Sixth edition of Sermons, Vol. iv. p. 126. &c.

And again, after enumerating several expressions relative to our redemption, he says, "All these import the same thing, namely, that the righteousness of Christ, *both his active and passive righteousness*, is the meritorious cause of our justification, and has procured for us, at God's hand, that upon our believing, we should be accounted righteous by him." And again, "I always did, and do still continually affirm, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to every believer."* Let it be observed, that it is the *human righteousness of Christ*, for the imputation of which Mr Wesley so strenuously contends in this sermon, "as the whole and sole meritorious cause of a sinner's justification before God;" and he ranks all unbelievers of this doctrine among infidels, Socinians, and Arians. He did not then appear to anticipate the denial of it by some preachers of his own connexion, in a few years after his death; and that the bare mention of it would be sufficient to impeach a man's orthodoxy, and obtain for him the name of Calvinist, or Antinomian, from many of his Methodist brethren! —Yet this is the fact; and the consequence is, that this most glorious and fundamental doctrine is nearly banished from our pulpits, to make way for the fashionable self-righteousness of rigid Arminianism.

But, secondly, this doctrine being thus amply proved to be true, let us now inquire what is its proper and legitimate use? Among the first and

* Sixth edition of Sermons, Vol. iv. p. 126.—129. Sect. 1.

principal branches of this we place our reconciliation to God *, and our restoration to the divine favour, for we are accepted in the beloved Son of God, through the redemption that is in him †, for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," not imputing their trespasses into them, but unto Christ; and imputing to them the merits of his Son, who thereby becomes the propitiation for sin, the foundation of the sinner's hope, and the source of his peace with God; all which are founded upon the imputation of his active and passive righteousness to them. But thirdly, it is the essential and fundamental source, and only procuring cause, of the justification of the persons and characters of true believers, whereby they not only become eligible, but entitled upon the principles of justice and truth, as well as those of mercy and love, to the happiness of the saints upon earth, and to the glorious joys of the redeemed in heaven, to both of which the pardon of sin is only a prelude ‡.

* It is hoped none will here object, and say, that it is our repentance which reconciles us to God. Repentance is without doubt necessary to salvation. But true repentance is the work of the spirit of God in the heart, (2 Tim. ii. 25.) and is the purchase of the blood and righteousness of Christ; without which as a christian grace, it could have had no existence. The repentance of Judas availed him not, for it was the repentance of despair!

† See Mr Wesley's Sermons already cited, p. 122.

‡ The judicious Baxter, in his *Aphorisms on Justification*, hath observed, (Prop. 15.) "Our legal righteousness of the first covenant is not personal, or consisteth not in any sanctification

Let us again attend to Mr Wesley; upon this important point it does not appear that he ever radically changed his opinions. "But when (saith "he) is it imputed?* When they believe. In that "very hour, the righteousness of Christ is theirs. It "is imputed to every one that believes, as soon as "he believes; faith and the righteousness of Christ "are inseparable. For if he believes according to "scripture, he believes in the righteousness of "Christ. There is no true faith, that is justifying "faith, which hath not the righteousness of Christ "for its object." Here then the absolute necessity of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and faith in that imputation, are completely established as the only possible source of justification. Is it right then for Methodist preachers to banish this doctrine from their pulpits? But again, "This "is not only the means of our obtaining the favour "of God, but of continuing therein. It is thus we "come to God at first, it is by the same we come "unto him ever after. We walk in the same "new and living way, till our spirit returns to God."

Yea, though a believer may be full of faith, and of all holiness, and abundant in good works, still Mr Wesley will not admit any or all of these, to have any share in meriting the divine favour to our

of our own persons, or actions performed by us (for we never fulfilled nor personally satisfied the law,) but it is wholly without us in Christ."

† Same Sermon, p. 121.

souls. Speaking of these he says :* " I take particular care to put each of these in its proper place. The righteousness of Christ is the whole and sole foundation of all our hope. By faith we build upon this foundation.—God gives this faith. We believe, we love, we endeavour to walk in all the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ, blameless. Yet,

"While thus we bestow,
Our moments below,
Ourselves we forsake,
And refuge in Jesus's righteousness take.
His passion alone
The foundation we own,
And pardon we claim,
And eternal redemption in Jesus's name."

Exactly to the same effect are the following lines of the same poet,

" We all are forgiven for Jesus's sake ;
Our title to heaven his merits we take."

And again,—

" Thy righteousness wearing, and cleansed by thy blood,
Bold shall they appear in the presence of God."

And lastly,

" Jesu, thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress ;
Midst flaming worlds in these array'd
With joy shall I lift up my head."

* *Same Sermon*, p. 128.

The whole hymn expresses the same sentiment, from the beginning to the end.

If this, therefore, be the legitimate title of a believer to glory, it is impossible to seek for another, without abandoning this. And this we do, the moment we deny the imputation of those merits to ourselves; we then virtually abandon our interest in the righteousness of Christ, and build our hopes upon our own righteousness alone. It is plain, therefore, from the testimony of scripture, from the authority of our own church, from the avowed sentiments of Mr Wesley, and from the concurrent suffrages of thousands of the most pious ministers, and most enlightened commentators, who have adorned and illuminated the christian churches in all ages, that the proper and legitimate use of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to believers, is not only to lay it as the foundation of their present acceptance with God, but also as their sole title to celestial glory. The faith and love which this holy doctrine inspires, increase the capacity of the soul for enjoying a more exceeding and eternal weight of that glory; and hence we perceive the true source of the increased reward, of the most eminently faithful and holy saints: for God will limit the eternal felicity of his children, only by their capacities of enjoyment.

Let this important truth sink deep into our hearts, and it will prove an antidote against the popish notion to which, it is to be feared, we are rapidly verging, "that the reward of the righteous will be the result of the intrinsic *merit* of their works." The

fact is, their works can have no intrinsic merit, adequate to the demands of the law of God, nor can this tenet be maintained upon any other principle but that of works of supererogation. All the genuine merit which can be ascribed to either the persons or the works of believers, is derived from their union with their living head, and from the imputation of his personal righteousness alone*. This is the true evangelical doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But, thirdly, let us inquire what are the abuses to which this doctrine is liable, and how are they to be avoided? This holy, evangelical, and sublime doctrine containing, as we have seen, the very essence and marrow of the gospel, is liable to be abused, as the

* It is however admitted, that there will be a distinction in the degrees of glory and felicity of the redeemed; which is evident from I. Cor. xv. 41. 42. and other passages. But this distinction is not founded upon any *abstract merit* in the different works of believers; for no works are acceptable with God, but those which spring from faith and love, which apprehend and display the efficacy of the righteousness of Christ: and their esteem and value in the sight of God, are in proportion, as those graces are found to operate in their production. Nay, faith and love alone, where there is no opportunity of producing the external works which usually flow from them (as in some cases of of death-bed conversions, &c.) are considered by God as the genuine fruits of his holy spirit, and are the pledges of eternal felicity. (See Gal. v. 22. 23.) But it is plain, that these, and every other grace of the holy spirit, can spring only from a deep and intimate spiritual communion with Christ Jesus, our living head, from whom all their value, and all their perfection is derived; so that we are necessarily driven back upon his merits alone, in all our attempts to establish the acceptation of our persons, or our claim on the reward of eternal life.

mercy of God also continually is, to Antinomian purposes. Men whose natures are unchanged, who love sin, and who are consequently impatient under the mild and easy yoke of the gospel, have profaned this sacred privilege of the children of God. Such men have said, they are complete in Christ, while wallowing in their sins, and committing all uncleanness with greediness; they have exclaimed that although sinful in themselves, they are nevertheless righteous in the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they stand accepted and well-beloved of God, though living in the open and flagrant breach of his commandments. This is, indeed, to make Christ the minister of sin, it is practical Antinomianism of the first class! But what of all this? Are these men real genuine believers in Christ, and are they actually interested in his meritorious death and righteousness? By no means: they have no kind of claim upon the benefits of either the one or the other. They are of their father the devil, for his works they do. These may and probably will perish under their deplorable delusion: but what have the children of God to do with these? Pity them, pray for them, reprove and exhort them, they may; but surely it is paying these men rather too much respect to sacrifice the truth of God to their hypocrisy and impiety, and surrender one of the most exalted privileges, and most important truths of the gospel, for their accommodation! If the imputation of the righteousness of Christ must be given up, for fear of encouraging Antinomianism, let the doctrine of the atonement go along with it, for thousands make it also a plea for sin, and

some have even built the salvation of devils upon this tried foundation!

But there is a kind of Antinomianism, which is not of quite so flagrant a nature as that already described. This creeps into the church of God, and finds place in the hearts, and in the lives of many high professors of true and vital godliness. And it is true, that some of these have attempted to draw the robe of Christ's righteousness, over the iniquities in which they secretly indulge. But will any man be bold enough to charge this hypocrisy upon the doctrine which it abuses? Surely not! The sin which it is called in to cover, would have existed if the doctrine had never been heard of; but it is the proper business of a faithful minister of the gospel, to search out and detect these self-deceivers, and if they have the folly or presumption to plead the imputation of the righteousness of Christ as a license for wilful sin, let him thunder in their ears from the oracles of inspiration, the impossibility of obtaining salvation without perfect sincerity, complete holiness, and entire dedication of body, soul, and spirit to the glory and service of God. If he is "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed," he will be at no loss for texts, to support these important truths.

But in doing this, he need not set one part of the gospel at variance with another. "God's imputing the righteousness of Christ to believers for their justification (says the venerable John Fletcher,) is a blessed reality, which demands our most ardent praise; and is the true foundation of every blessing

we enjoy. But our imputing that righteousness to ourselves, as a cloke for sin, is a trick of our Antinomian hearts, and cannot be too much guarded against." It would be a bad argument in favour of starving my children to say, that some persons have occasionally mixed poison with wholesome food. It is my business to see that they get their bread free from all deleterious mixture. Thus let us preserve and use our doctrines to the glory of their divine author, while we carefully guard against their abuse.

We now come to consider, fourthly, some objections which have been urged against this holy doctrine. A friend, high in the esteem and affection of the author, hath demanded "Had our blessed Lord any "personal righteousness to spare? Did it not re- "quire all he possessed and performed, to justify "his own person as man, and give himself a clear title to glory?" To this it is replied, first: Christ both did and suffered more than was necessary for the justification of his own person, for he "magnified the law and made it honourable".* He not only satisfied the utmost penal demands of the law, and fulfilled its most extensive claims upon personal obedience to its precepts, but he did more: he added honour and dignity to the law itself, by the extra-perfection of his love, his zeal, and his labour for the salvation of men. And had he not done incomparably more than the law required for the mere justification of his own person, it would have been

* Isaiah xlii. 21.

impossible for a single soul of man to have been saved by the merit of his obedience, which however we have seen, is adequate to the redemption of the whole world. How transcendently perfect, redundant, and meritorious then must his personal righteousness have been!

The efficient causes of this were, first, the divinity which dwelt so abundantly in him; and, secondly, the excellency of power which was attached to his sacred person, as the only begotten Son of God*. For he derived not his spiritual humanity from any human being, but it is the immediate offspring of God; and this placed him in a rank and power above the angels as well as over men†.

By both these predicates, it is evident he was exalted far above the weakness and imperfection of human nature, for which that law was adapted, and to do which it was given, whereby he was enabled, and unquestionably did do much more than was absolutely necessary to vindicate and justify his own character.

* Psalms, ii. 7.—John, i. 14.—Hebrews, i. 4. 6.

Dr Adam Clarke is of opinion, that "This was a mere creation in the womb of the virgin, by the energy of the Holy Ghost;" adding, "he is the only person born of a woman, whose human nature never came by the ordinary way of generation."—See his *Commentary on* "*The only begotten of the Father.*" (John i. 14.) But with all due deference to so high an authority, the writer of this is rather inclined to embrace the opinion of the pre-existence of the mediatorial Jesus, in his spiritual nature. Upon this hypothesis the above reasoning is maintained. The principles upon which this opinion is founded, the author hopes soon to lay before the public in a detailed form.

† Heb. i. 4.

Nay, it is a question whether a well-founded title to glory could rest on a mere performance of the duties required by the law? If God has a right to claim that obedience which the law requires from every human being, could that temporary obedience demand from the justice of God an eternal reward of glory and felicity? Would the performer of it do any thing more than his duty?—Certainly not. Hence it follows then, that had it been necessary for our blessed Lord, as an individual man, to have wrought out for himself a title to glory, he must have done incomparably more than the law actually required of him, to enable him to establish a just claim upon the justice of God, to the inheritance of eternal glory, even in his own person. And here indeed the matter would rest, if we were to consider Jesus Christ as an insulated individual. But we are not at liberty thus to consider him; for, in the second place, he is uniformly represented in scripture as the great federal head of mankind*, and particularly so to his own redeemed children, who are described as the members of his spiritual body†, and he is their representative‡ as well as advocate with God. Consequently they are interested in all he hath done, as well as all he hath suffered, the latter being altogether on their account, and possibly the former also; for certainly had it not been on our account, Jesus needed not to have come into this world at all, for we

* 1 Cor. xv. 45.-49.

† Cor. vi. 15.-17. vii. 27.—Eph. iv. 15.

‡ Heb. viii. 1,-5, &c. ix. 12.-24. vii. 25.

know his felicity was complete, and his glory exalted above every creature, ages before his incarnation*, —nay, before the creation of the world. His personal righteousness, therefore, was not necessary to establish his title to glory, and it is remarkable that he never once claims such a reward upon that foundation, but uniformly speaks of it as a resumption of that glory which he enjoyed (doubtless upon a well-founded title,) before the foundation of the world, but which he laid aside for a little season, that he might have an opportunity of "humbling himself, and taking upon him the form of a servant, and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,"† for us men and for our salvation.

The title, therefore, upon which Christ enjoyed his glory, before his incarnation, was never forfeited, and consequently stood in no need of re-establishment; but by his incarnation, obedience, and death, he enhanced that glory‡, and, at the same time, purchased a participation in it for all his redeemed children; who claim their inheritance, by virtue of their interest in his vicarious life, death, and resurrection.

* John xvii. 5,-24.

† Philip, ii. 6.-10.—The circumstances of humiliation and death, are not to be applied to the Deity of the second person in the Trinity; it is evident they could only relate to his humanity: but this appears to have been the medium of all human intercourse with God, prior to the incarnation of Christ. We read of no mediator between God and man at any period, but the man, Christ Jesus.

‡ Phil. ii. 9.-10.—Heb. ii. 12.-17.

Again; some have strangely imagined that the doctrine of the imputation of righteousness, implies a confusion of persons. As though God were capable of deceiving himself into a belief, that we are personally righteous, and actually holy, because he imputes those qualities to us, being found in a plentiful redundancy in the person and character of his only begotten Son. But those persons must have very superficial views of the plan of salvation; they appear to have lost sight, both of the vicarious character assumed by our Lord, and the close relation in which believers stand to him, both spiritually and temporally, as well as their interest in his life and death. God doth not confound our persons with that of Christ, neither doth he believe we are righteous and holy, when we are not actually so.

But by imputing the righteousness of his Son to us (and his right to do so, who shall dispute,) he satisfies his own truth and justice, in treating us as righteous and holy persons: and thus opens a legal door, by which he admits us to the evangelical privileges of a free salvation, to which he thus gives us a well-founded title. And in pursuance of this divine plan, he instantly commences in every true believer, the work of sanctification; purifying our hearts by the inspiration of his holy spirit, and putting us in possession of a divine nature, which proves our title clear, and demonstrates that we are really, as well as imputatively the children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ, and heirs together with him of everlasting life.

But some have supposed, that the doctrine of imputed righteousness has a direct tendency to impede the progress of personal holiness, and oppose the practice of genuine piety. The assertors of this are perhaps not aware that the establishment of this principle would set the religion of Christ at variance with itself. For if God be the author of that doctrine (and it has been pretty clearly proved that he is,) then it would follow that, if it is found to impede the progress of holiness, or oppose the practice of true piety, God must be divided against himself, and thus destroy his own work,—a degree of folly which our Lord would not even ascribe to Satan. We ought therefore to be cautious how we throw out such an insinuation against the king of heaven! But, give me leave to ask the promulgator of this libel on the truth of God, Where did you learn this sentiment? Was it from your own experience? Then you are an Antinomian in practice, and you wish to filiate your hypocrisy on the evangelical doctrines of the gospel of Christ! I suspect it will be more correct if you charge it to its proper account in the deceitfulness of your own heart.

But we cannot admit this accusation; on the contrary we assert, that so far is the doctrine of imputed righteousness from having any injurious effect upon true holiness, that it is the only genuine source from which it can spring. But it keeps this holiness in its proper place; that is, as a fruit of faith and of the spirit of adoption, which are themselves founded upon the imputa-

tion of righteousness, for our justification. But it indeed cuts off the hopes of the Pharisee, who seeks acceptance with God upon the merit of his own obedience or fancied righteousness.

Upon an impartial survey of the general principles and feelings which prevail in the Methodist societies, it must be confessed that the preponderating bias is towards a Pharisaic spirit. Many of our people seem not at all aware of any danger arising from the indulgence of this; and it is cause of sincere regret, that the sermons of some of our preachers have an unhappy tendency to establish and confirm this bias. They incessantly urge the works of the law, indiscriminately upon saints and sinners; and this as the principal, if not the only means of reconciling sinners to God, and God to them; and of establishing believers in the favour of heaven: faith, according to them, being only a *rational conviction* of the great truths of revelation, and its only use to act as a spur to our endeavours to fulfil the righteousness of the law, which is to be our chief passport to heaven.

It has already been observed, that, on the spot where this is written, the Methodists have been deluged with these Pharisaical sentiments *. And what was the consequence? The people never were

* It was a common and favourite saying with one preacher, "that no man need expect to find favour with God, or receive pardon from him, who did not come to him *with clean hands, and a pure heart!*" It is not then enough that he should repent of his sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, for their pardon. He must first convert himself, sanctify his nature, purify his

in so dead, formal, and lifeless a state. And no wonder, for it is the gospel and not the law by which mankind are now to be saved. It is not by drilling sinners into a slavish and fruitless attempt to conform their hearts and lives to the law of God, that they are to become converted; but by convincing them of their utter helplessness and inability thus to conform themselves; and to point and guide them to the lamb of God, that he may take away their sins, wash them with his own blood, and shed upon them the renewing influences of his holy spirit; and thus makes them "new creatures in Christ Jesus."

This is the gospel plan of salvation, and this also was the primitive Methodist plan of salvation; and until we revert back to it, we shall have little success in winning souls to God. Have we forgotten that the law has no other legitimate use as to sinners, under the christian dispensation, but to drive them to the righteousness of Christ for their justification from its demands? And as to saints, to become a living principle of loving obedience, when it is written on their hearts by the spirit of God? But

heart, rectify his conduct, and, in short, redeem himself from all iniquity; and then he may come to Christ upon the merits of *his own* obedience and holiness, for the forgiveness of his sins! Has a sinner then *clean hands and a pure heart?* Can he give these to himself? If so, he needs no Saviour: he need not come to Christ, for mercy, grace, pardon, or redemption! Having clean hands and a pure heart, it is evident he already fulfils the righteousness of the law! What kind of doctrine is this, to be endured in a Methodist congregation?

the man who presumes to lay down conformity to the law, as the terms of a sinner's acceptance with God, overturns the whole system of salvation by faith, and leads the unhappy souls who fall under his care, into the misery of dispair, or the delusions of Pharisaism!

It is incalculable what mischiefs one such man may do in the Methodist connexion; nor can we acquit ourselves in the sight of God, as faithful stewards of the mysteries of salvation, if, from any motive whatever, we suffer such principles to be propagated amongst us.

These principles naturally result from the rejection of the fundamental doctrine of the imputation of the personal righteousness of Christ to penitent believing sinners, for their justification before God. They are properly stiled *penitent, believing sinners,* for this is their true character. Sinners they are, though not wilful sinners; but involuntarily subjected to the law of sin and death*, which yet reigns in their members: they are groaning for deliverance, but have not yet obtained it. Penitent they are, for this is indicated by their strong cries and tears before God, for mercy and salvation. And believing they unquestionably are, though not yet "with the heart unto righteousness;" yet firmly in the truth of both the threatenings and the promises of God; hence the mixture of hope and fear which divides their anxious breast! Preach the law to these men, urge them to a careful observance of its pre-

* Rom. vii. 18,-25.

cepts as the source of their full reconciliation with God, and you ruin their souls, you drive them to despair, or you make them Pharisees. But preach to them the gospel,—tell them, with honest John Wesley, that "the righteousness of Christ is now the proper object of their faith," that it is their rightful inheritance; and that invested with this, God will accept, love, and reward them as righteous; and will acknowledge their title to a share in his glory; that they shall become heirs of God, by virtue of their union with their living head, and joint heirs with Christ, because interested in his redeeming grace, and washed in his precious blood: Preach these glad tidings to the heart of the fainting sinner, until he lays hold upon them by that faith which works by love; and thus shall you speedily see his soul brought from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God!

But supposing, we were to treat this hallowed doctrine as the fanatics of King Charles's day did the house of Lords, and vote it to be both useless and dangerous, it would then be worth our while to inquire what we could advantageously substitute in its place? God hath made it both the foundation-stone in his spiritual building *, and the key-stone in the arch of salvation; and Mr Wesley has given it the same rank in the fabric of Methodism. Architects will inform you that it is somewhat dangerous to remove these main pillars of the building.

* 1 Peter, ii. 6, 7.

But what will you substitute in their place? Not a single stone in the whole quarry of revelation will answer the purpose! You have nothing left but to daub up the vacancy with the untempered mortar of self-righteousness, and the Pharisaic rubbish of half-hearted professors!

But to drop the figure: It is certain there is no medium between our reliance upon the merits of Christ, and upon those of our own works for our final acceptance with God. It is true that the good works of believers will be adduced as evidences of their faith and love, on the great day of final retribution; and the blessed Jesus will distribute the rewards of eternal felicity, in the proportions which his infinite wisdom, and unerring goodness will dictate.

But the precise rule, by which our gracious Lord will govern his decisions upon that great and interesting subject, is not revealed to us. Possibly he may in some cases see it good to give as great reward to those who were called only at the eleventh hour, as to others who, to all external appearance had faithfully borne the burthen and heat of the day for many years;* "for the reward is not of debt, but of grace; not of works, lest any man should boast!"† For it is by no means an impossible case, that a person recently converted before death, may depart with abundantly more vigorous faith and love, than one who has been many years a half-hearted professor, who may yet by a miracle of grace escape the dam-

* Matthew, xx. 9—15. † Romans, iv. 4, 5.—Eph. ii. 9.

nation of hell. The consummate wisdom and goodness of the righteous judge will decide every case in such a way, as will best comport with his own glory, and that portion of happiness, which his wisdom and grace shall allot to each individual. Let us labour to attain, by faith in his righteousness, a rich and glorious inheritance in our Father's kingdom.

Some, however, there are, who admit this evangelical doctrine to be true; yet they are extremely reluctant publicly to acknowledge it; first, because of the popular feeling which has been excited against it; and secondly, from a mistaken idea that it has a natural tendency to promote Antimonianism, and to encourage the professors of religion in that indolence and apathy respecting the great concerns of eternity, which we have cause so seriously to lament. They think its publication would damp the zeal of the saint, while it encourages the licentiousness of the sinner.

But there is no foundation for these apprehensions; genuine piety will never be diminished by that which gives it birth; nor are we justifiable in suppressing an acknowledged principle of the gospel upon vague apprehensions of its injurious effects. If we begin to sacrifice the truths of christianity to fears of this kind, we may give up every branch of our holy religion in succession; and our Lord will not thank us for our labour. Let us not imagine we are capable of mending the great plan of salvation laid down by Christ himself, or foolishly undertake to correct the doctrines he hath connected with with it. Rather let us fearlessly publish the whole

truth as it is in Jesus, leaving the event with its great author; lest by suppressing a main pillar of that truth, we lead men to build upon a rotten foundation; for although we may erect thereon some works of a splendid external appearance, we may rest assured, they will not stand the test of that fire which shall try every man's work*, but will be consumed as "wood, hay, and stubble," unless founded on the imputed merits of our Almighty Saviour. *For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid by God himself, in the personal righteousness and imputed merits of Jesus Christ.* If any man abuse this evangelical doctrine, by attempting to make it a plea for an Antinomian practice, let that man's guilt rest upon his own head; but let not the holy principles of our religion be stigmatised as destructive of that morality which they every where inculcate and enforce.

* 1 Cor. iii. 11.-15.

CHAP. IV.

OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST.—INQUIRY INTO ITS NATURE, BASIS, AND DESIGN.—NOT SYNONYMOUS WITH THE PARDON OF SIN, BUT FOUNDED ON THE IMPUTATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.—LEGAL IN ITS NATURE BUT EVANGELICAL IN ITS OPERATION.—REFLECTIONS ON THIS DOCTRINE.—OF REGENERATION.—ITS NATURE AND DESIGN.—EFFECTS UPON INFANTS AND ADULTS INVESTIGATED.—GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF THIS WORK.—OF FAITH.—DIVERSITY OF OPINION RESPECTING THIS.—A TRUE SCRIPTURAL DEFINITION OF IT ATTEMPTED.

SECTION I.—*Of Justification.*

THE important doctrine of the justification of a sinner, by a God of unimpeachable truth and inflexible justice, is clearly revealed in the sacred writings. It is therein asserted to be the happy privileges of the sons of Adam, essential to their salvation, and a fundamental principle in the truth of that gospel which is ordained of God to be the medium of our reconciliation to himself. This doctrine is also embraced by the body of Methodists, and closely interwoven with those principles which, as far as can be ascertained, are supposed to constitute the system of speculative and experimental religion, which directs the views and governs the practice of that conspicuous and eminent body of christians.

The Methodists are also generally agreed respecting the means by which this important blessing is to be attained, at least under the christian dispensation; that it is by faith in the great atoning sacrifice and mediation in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not by the deeds of the law, the scriptures expressly declaring that by these, no flesh living can be justified before God*. But although the thing itself be admitted as a fundamental principle, and the terms and medium by which it is attainable, are pretty well settled; yet the nature of this christian privilege is perhaps not quite so accurately defined, or so well understood in the Methodist connexion, as it might and ought to be. Hence there is a diversity of opinion on this interesting subject, which requires to be corrected; in order to which it may be necessary to investigate both the nature and the design of this christian privilege, the ground upon which it stands, the situation in which it places its possessor, and the ends it is intended to answer. A candid inquiry into these points, assisted by the spirit and word of God, may happily have a tendency to remove some of the obscurity which yet seems to rest upon this glorious privilege of the children of God, and render us more unanimous in our opinions respecting its nature and operation.

The most general sentiment in the Methodist connexion concerning this is, that it is perfectly synonymous with the forgiveness of sins; the removal of guilt, and of the liability to punishment which we

* Romans, iii. 20.

incur thereby; a mere exoneration from the penalties to which a breach of the divine law subjects every transgressor. But inasmuch as it is evident that this blessing, great and important as it doubtless is, comes not up to the literal meaning of the term justification, many of our people and preachers appear at a loss to account for the use of a word in the inspired writings, which they conceive cannot, with any propriety, be applied to the state of those whom it describes. Hence, in their commentaries on the term, they generally explain away its meaning, and thereby, perhaps inadvertently, yet strongly insinuate that the inspired writers have incautiously made use of a wrong term, in describing the privileges of the children of God; all idea of the *justification of a sinner*, in the proper sense of the word, being totally out of the question, altogether incompatible either with the truth of God, or the state of man; that, therefore the word can mean neither more nor less than *the forgiveness of sin:* and, as they uniformly correct the inspired writers, by changing these terms, it is plain they are of opinion that the apostles would have been more accurate, if they had not applied this term of *justification* to the state of the redeemed children of God. They appear to think that it would be the height of presumption in a sinner to lay any claim to the justification of either his person or his character before a righteous God; and that if ever he is saved it must be only as a *pardoned rebel*, and not as a justified saint. This sentiment they fortify with scripture, citing perhaps the words of David in support of it: "Enter not into

judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."*

As, however, St Paul asserts in direct terms the positive justification of believers in Christ, we must not surrender this glorious privilege of the children of God, to the misconceptions or prejudices of its adversaries; but, in a spirit of christian love, contend for its establishment upon those scriptural and rational grounds, whereon the wisdom and goodness of God hath graciously placed it, to his own glory and our endless felicity. The words of David just quoted certainly prove, that "*By the deeds of the law* no flesh living shall be justified in the sight of God;" for he prefaces this declaration with "Enter not into judgment with thy servant." Now, if God, enter into judgment with us, the rule of that judgment must be his own righteous law, by which we acknowledge, with St Paul†, we can have no pretensions to justification. It being by that mercy which St James informs, "rejoiceth against judgment,"‡ that every believer becomes entitled to, and possessed of this glorious privilege.

The fact, that believers in Christ are actually justified in the sight of God, yea, that God himself is the author and vindicator of their justification, is too clearly asserted by the inspired writers, to admit of a serious controversy among christians. It, therefore, only remains for us to trace out the nature, and define the terms of this important blessing, as these are established and declared by the wisdom

*Psalms, cxliii. 2. † Rom. iii. 20. ‡ James ii. 13.

and goodness of God under the christian dispensation; for in this controversy it is evident we can have nothing to do with any other. Jews and Heathens we leave to him that made them. And in the first place, let us endeavour to fix the genuine meaning of the term; and this not only as it is accepted among us in familiar language, but as it is used by the inspired authors of scripture; and we shall for the present take it for granted, that these holy men were accurate in their choice, and correct in their application of this term to the states of the redeemed children of God. The literal meaning of the verb *justify*, is to declare the party in question to be innocent and righteous. It vindicates his person from accusation, and his character from reproach, and upon principles of truth and justice, it defends him from the punishment due to the commission of crime. In short, it vindicates him from the imputation of transgression; and imputes to him innocence of character, and rectitude of conduct. Now it is plain that if God, who is rectitude itself, undertakes to justify any person or character, that justification must embrace those legitimate principles, upon which alone this important blessing can be founded; and however incongruous this may appear at first view to short-sighted mortals, when applied to the persons and characters of transgressors,—we may venture to rely upon the divine integrity for its accuracy, in adopting this as the foundation of a sinner's title to eternal felicity.

If we search the sacred records of inspiration, we shall find, that the term justify, and its various de-

rivations, are uniformly used to express the innocence or integrity of the characters described*, and when we see it selected by the spirit of God, applied to the persons or characters of believers in Christ, it must imply, that whatever they formerly were, these are now justly susceptible of vindication from the imputation of guilt, and of the actual ascription of holiness and uprightness to them, by a God of truth and justice, "who will by no means clear the guilty,"† and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, without reprobation and abhorrence.

In the application of this term to the christian character, we must not suppose that its original meaning is altered, or that it is degraded from the primary signification which it every where else sustains; and although in that application, it necessarily includes the pardon of past sin, yet this does not even constitute the basis of our justification; much less can we recognise the terms as perfectly synonymous. On the contrary we shall find, that although the justification of a believer in Christ, is uniformly preceded or accompanied by pardon, yet the foundation of his justification is laid in the personal righteousness of Christ, imputed to him for that express purpose‡. For however the pardon of sin may exonerate me from the punishment due to

* For instances of this we refer to Deut. xxv. 1. Psalm. li. 4. Prov. xvii. 15. Isaiah v. 23. Rom. ii 13. 1. Tim. iii. 16. In all which places, the terms are declaratory of righteousness and integrity.

† Exodus, xxxiv. 7.

‡ See the preceding Chapter.

my transgressions, it is plain this blessing can furnish no foundation whereon to erect the justification of my person or character. Rather the very circumstance of pardoning my sin represents me as a guilty criminal, as one who, by the clemency of my judge*, has narrowly escaped a justly merited execution; but it pretends not to vindicate or defend my character from the reproach and disgrace which my transgressions have justly incurred.

But God expressly undertakes to do this for his redeemed children. For "who (crieth St Paul,) shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect"?† Why? Because, " it is God that justifieth them. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died :" and thus washed away our sins in his own blood : "Yea rather, that is risen again," and thus proclaimed our justification, and vindicated our title to eternal life; for though " he was delivered for our offences, yet he rose again for our justification into life eternal."‡ It is therefore evident, that the pardon of our sins, and the justification of our persons, although they

* We should think it strange and absurd, if an earthly judge in pardoning a convicted criminal, should undertake to justify, that is, to vindicate and defend the person and character of that criminal, from the imputation of crime. The reason is, because that pardon is the effect of mere clemency and benevolence; it is not purchased by adequate merit, and compensating righteousness, found in a vicarious substitute, and imputed to the criminal. If that were the case, the criminal would be judicially entitled, upon forensic principles, to the justification of his person and character. It is evident that this is the very ground on which the justification of the believer in Christ is founded.

† Rom viii. 33, 34. ‡ Rom. iv. 25.

may be simultaneous in their operation, are nevertheless perfectly distinct in their nature, and resting on distinct foundations. The first reposes exclusively upon the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and the second upon his perfect fulfilment of the preceptive law; both which are imputed to every believer for his personal justification. And the perfect obedience of Christ, as well as his complete sacrifice, being demonstrated by his liberation from the bands of death; his glorious resurrection, while it asserts his own immaculate righteousness, maintains also the justification of every one who stedfastly believeth on him to the salvation of the soul. The union which exists between the Lord Jesus Christ and his living members, we have already seen, gives them a deep and decided interest in all that, as their head and representative, he hath done and suffered for them. Hence we see the justification of a believer is both judicial and evangelical: judicial in the sight of God as founded on the perfect righteousness of Christ, which meritoriously demands the justification of his living members; but evangelical in its operation, as it respects the freedom of its communication, through the medium of the gospel of peace to our souls.

If we minutely examine the chain of reasoning upon this important point, which runs from the 20th to the 31st verse of Romans, c. iii. we shall find the principles here laid down, completely established by the great apostle. Confessing, that owing to the imperfections of our fallen nature, all hope of* justifi-

* This phrase, "justification by the deeds of the law," proves that it is a real and judicial justification, and not the mere par-

cation by the deeds of the law, was at an end; he proceeds to establish that justification upon the superior basis of the gospel; and in doing this he plainly shews, that this proceeds upon the truth and justice, as well as upon the mercy of God. And recognising (ver. 21,) the principle, that adequate righteousness was requisite as the basis of justification, he asserts, that God hath already provided that, without our personal conformity to the law. "But now (saith he,) the righteousness of God* without the law, is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets:" that is, both the law and the prophets unite their testimony, as it were, in the concurrent support and approbation of this divine method of justifying sinners, by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to them, inasmuch as in his person and offices the law hath met its full satisfaction, and the predictions of the prophets their complete accomplishment.

don of sin, of which the apostle is here treating. For no man ever yet dreamed of obtaining forgiveness of his sins, by the deeds of the law, which is a contradiction in terms; for if he fulfilled the demands of the law, it is plain he could require no forgiveness, as he would be guilty of no crime.

* It is true, some persons, to whose Pharisaic spirits this evangelical doctrine is a stumbling-block, take the trifling liberty of altering the word *righteousness* here to *mercy*. This unwarrantable and impious practice has been emphatically termed "making the scriptures a nose of wax;" and twisting them into any form we please, to render them subservient to our own prejudices. It is astonishing that any man, pretending either to sense or piety, will attempt to maintain an argument founded upon a plain and avowed perversion of scripture!

He saith moreover, that this righteousness, perfect and complete in its nature, and styled emphatically *the righteousness of God* (God our Saviour, to distinguish it from that of man,) is* (imputed) to all, and (rests) upon all them that believe, being communicated and imparted by faith in Jesus Christ, its possessors being "justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And (ver. 25. 26,) to *declare his righteousness*†, for the remission of sins that are past. To declare, I say, (observe the emphatic repetition) his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus: that God having provided in the person of his only Son an adequate righteousness, upon the imputation of which to believers in him, he might without impeachment of his justice, and without the violation of his truth, justify the persons and characters of the ungodly‡, their faith being counted to them for righteousness, because it embraceth that of their great Redeemer. So that, although sin had formerly reigned in them unto the death of their souls, yet that grace might henceforth reign in them, through this righteousness, unto eternal life§.

As this interesting subject is of vital importance to the happiness of mankind, it may be worth our

* The interposed words are requisite to supply the ellipsis: their propriety will hardly be disputed.

† In these places also, the word *mercy* has been substituted for *righteousness*, with what truth let those who understand the original word δικαιοσυνη (in Latin *justitia, æquitas,*) judge!

‡ Romans, iv. 5. § Romans, v. 21.

while to take a more minute survey of the incomparable plan devised by the consummate wisdom of the deity, and executed under the sanction of his divine justice, by his tender love for the fallen race of Adam; whereby he gives to the chief of sinners a complete, a permanent, and an incontestible title to eternal life, supported and maintained upon principles of justice and equity. Herein we shall perceive the harmony of the divine attributes with the doctrines of revelation, and the union of our felicity with the glory of our creator, displayed in the unsearchable riches of redeeming grace.

To accomplish the salvation of man, by means of their justification by faith, and upon principles consonant to the perfections of the divine nature, and the economy of grace, it would appear that three points are to be attained, to satisfy three corresponding claims in the attributes of the Deity. Those three points are,—atonement, innocence, and righteousness.

The first of these must be obtained to satisfy the claims of justice, God being bound, as the moral governor of the universe, to punish sin, which is found in every man; and hence his express declaration, confirming the claim of his justice, "The soul that sinneth it shall die."*

Secondly, innocence must be established, as a foundation of our acceptance with God, upon the basis of the divine truth; for God hath expressly declared, that "He will by no means clear the guilty."†

* Ezekiel, xviii. 4. † Exodus, xxxiv. 7.

And, thirdly, positive righteousness must be produced, as the ground whereon God, in the manifestation of his righteous judgment as the supreme and unbiased judge of the universe, can assign a reward proportioned to the merits of that righteousness, to those who justly claim a share in his eternal kingdom. For the scriptures declare, "That the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God,"* who will render unto every man according to his deeds†. Yet we find, that "the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give a crown of righteousness to all them that love his appearing."‡

To all these claims we shall find the different functions of the mediatorial office of the great High Priest of our profession, and they alone are admirably and gloriously responsive.

First, for atonement: For it is said of him, that "he was wounded for our transgressions: he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and by his stripes we are healed." And, "thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities." Also "he died the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." And again, "the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquities of us all."§ "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree: and by his stripes we are healed." And "he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for the sins

* 1 Corinthians, vi. 9. † Romans, ii. 6. ‡ 2 Timothy, iv. 8.
§ Isaiah, liii. 5.-8.-11.—1 Peter, ii. 24.—1 John, ii. 2.

of the whole world." And again, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."* And finally, "We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."†

Secondly, for innocence: It is said, "He hath washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father."‡ And again, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."§ And again, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."‖ And finally, "The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin."¶ And if from all sin, then from all guilt; from the imputation as well as from the actual existence of crime. Hence we derive a purity and innocence in the esteem of God, which is the first qualification for the kingdom of glory. This is the result of preceding atonement, and one branch of our justification before God.

Thirdly, for righteousness: Christ is expressly styled, "the Lord our righteousness;"** and is said to be "of God made unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."†† Again, "God hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."‡‡ And finally, "The righteousness of God (our Saviour) is unto all, and upon all them that believe."‖‖‖

* 1 Cor. v. 7. † Rom. v. 11. ‡ Rev. i. 5-6.
§ 2 Cor. v. 19. ‖ Rom. iv. 8. ¶ 1 John, i. 7.
** Jeremiah, xxiii. 6. †† 1 Cor. i. 30. ‡‡ 2 Cor. v. 21.
‖‖‖ Romans, iii. 22.

In these exceeding great and precious promises, these high and glorious privileges, we discover the grounds of our justification in the sight of God, who has thus made us "accepted in the beloved." It is upon this foundation that we become "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ;" we receive the spirit of adoption, whereby we are admitted into the family of heaven, and have a legitimate claim upon that salvation purchased by the Son of God for all his redeemed people. By faith we call him our God and our Father; his spirit bears witness with ours that we are his children, and our title to everlasting life is registered in heaven; our names being "written in the lamb's book of life,"* and our souls "kept by the mighty power of God, through faith unto eternal salvation."†

Now it is plain, that all this glorious system of justification proceeds upon the imputed merits of Christ to our souls. In ourselves we are originally totally destitute of the meritorious and procuring causes of this rich and important blessing: Guilty, we stand in need of the atoning blood of Christ to wash away that guilt, and the imputation thereof, from our souls: Unrighteous, we require a perfect righteousness as the ground of our justification, and one which is fully adequate to the demands of the law. For it is evident, that upon principles of truth and justice (and these, we may rest assured, will never be violated or defeated by their glorious author,) no man can be pardoned without atonement,

* Rev. xxi. 27. † 1 Peter, i. 5.

or justified without righteousness. But if both of these blessings are bestowed upon those who, up to that period, have been avowedly unrighteous, then it is plain, those blessings must flow to them from the merits of another imputed to them, as their own act and deed; that is to say, sinners are pardoned, and their persons and characters justified in the sight of God *, by the merits of Christ imputed to them: those merits being by them apprehended, embraced, and appropriated under the influence of that faith which works by love, and by the energy of the holy spirit of God, who himself points them to the lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world, and enables them to believe on him with "their hearts unto righteousness."

But while we thus earnestly contend for our justification by faith upon these truly evangelical principles, do we not overlook the necessity of personal holiness, as essential to our full restoration to the favour of God? By no means; we fully recognise this heaven-born principle, and contend also for its full sway and ultimate perfection in the soul of every

* It is said by St Paul concerning our Lord Jesus Christ,—"That he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. vii. 25.) His intercession is a grand branch of his mediation; and this all proceeds upon the foundation of his own merit. On this ground alone does intercession appear congruous to the divine nature. For we cannot suppose any change favourable to guilty man, to be wrought in the divine mind by the mere force of persuasion or intreaty. Intercession therefore must imply (to speak after the manner of men,) 1st, an exhibition of the meritorious ground on which the blessing is claimed.

true believer. We acknowledge this as indispensably necessary to salvation; but we dare not say that it is the condition of our reconciliation to God. Rather, it is a fruit of that reconciliation previously accomplished by simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the work of the spirit of holiness, who dwelleth in the hearts of the children of God, and transforms their souls into his lovely image; breathing into them, by his holy inspiration, the essence of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," which are the constituent parts of the inward kingdom of God in the soul of man. In this glorious work, the coincidence of our wills, the co-operation of all our mental faculties, and the engagement of our affections, are absolutely requisite. In the dedication of these to the glory and service of God consists the true practice of piety, without which, we hold it to be impossible for any man to retain the blessing of justification.

For this is the qualification necessary to that divine communion and fellowship with God, which, however it may be stigmatised as presumptuous or enthusiastic by the unregenerate and profane, who

And, 2d, a pleading of those merits as the effectual and, in fact, irresistible foundation, upon which the truth and justice, as well as mercy and goodness of God induce him to bestow them; and at the same time sanction and approve of the grant. Hence it is said, "God is both faithful and just to forgive us our sins." (1 John. i. 9.) And on this ground is justified the imperative aspect of that important request, "Father, *I will* that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." (John xvii. 24.)

scandalise the profession of christianity, is nevertheless the essence of true religion. "Truly (saith St John,) our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."* If we are not transformed into the image of God, it is impossible we can delight in him, and without delight there can be no enjoyment. "We love him, because he first loved us,"† and because "his love is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us;"‡ but without an inward assimilation of our nature to that heavenly principle, it is plain we can have neither relish nor qualification for communion with God upon earth, nor for the society of holy angels, and fellowship with the spirits of just men made perfect in the kingdom of God. If, therefore, we wish to retain our justification, and evidence our union with the Lord of life and glory, we must ever cultivate that "holiness, without which we are assured no man shall see the Lord."§

But in addition to the primary justification of a believer just described, we maintain also a second justification‖, both of our persons and works, at the awful tribunal of him who is ordained to be the judge of the quick and the dead.¶ And it would appear from the testimony of revelation, that the nature and extent of a believer's work will form the grand

* 1 John, i. 3. † 1 John, iv. 19. ‡ Rom. v. 5. § Heb. xii. 14.

‖ See this subject particularly treated of by Mr Fletcher in several parts of the polemical works of that venerable and learned divine.

¶ Acts, xvii, 31.

criterion of judgment* on that most solemn occasion. But although it must be admitted that the external works of the children of God will then be adduced as evidences of the sincerity of their piety, the ardour of their zeal, and the fervency of their love; yet it is very evident, that the intrinsic value of those works must be sought for in a deeper source than their mere existence. Good actions may occasionally be performed by men whose hearts are destitute of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, uninfluenced by genuine love to God, and without a spark of true charity for either the souls or bodies of men. These may originate in an ostentatious display of Pharisaic self-righteousness, and a desire to appropriate to ourselves the praise of men†. Of such works and their authors our Lord hath declared, "Verily I say unto you they have their reward."

But the heart-searching God will be at no loss to appreciate the genuine character of the persons and works of his redeemed children. And although the various imperfections which still attach to the holiest saints upon earth, connected with the obligations they lie under to the grace of God, for the production of every work acceptable to him, must for ever exclude all idea of absolute merit in their best performances, whether of piety or charity; yet, so far as their works are wrought under the influence of a living faith, and spring from the grace of our

* This is evident from Matt. xvi. 27.—xxv. 34.-36.—1 Cor. iii. 8. and Rev. ii. 23.

† Matt. vi. 1.-5.

Lord Jesus Christ, being governed and directed by the spirit of holiness, they are unquestionably valuable in the sight of God; and, under the evangelical principles of the gospel of Christ, are fairly entitled to a vast reward from the decision of the righteous judge, who will ultimately "render unto every man according as his works shall be."*

Yet even the most excellent of our works derive whatever value they possess from our union with Christ. This important fact is clearly proved, as well as eminently illustrated, by the admirable comparison which Jesus himself hath made, when he likens himself to a vine, and his living members to the branches: "I am the true vine† (saith the Son of God,) and ye are the branches; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me, for without (or separate from) me, ye can do nothing." Now, as no man thinks of ascribing the rich flavour of the grape to the branch, independent of the root and trunk, so no believer can lay claim to any degree of merit, but what he derives from the imputed righteousness of Christ. For this both bestows the primary blessing of justification, and furnishes the medium through which God implants in the soul the germ of that holiness, which, flourishing under the benign influence of grace, gradually eradicates the carnal mind, transforms the soul into the image of God, and finally produces those precious fruits of faith, hope, and love, of joy, and peace, and ever-

* Rev. ii. 23. † John, xv. 1.-6.

lasting consolation which at once constitute the fragrant ornaments, and the refreshing cordials of Christ's mystical spouse, both in time and eternity*.

But these fruits, great and valuable as they are, cannot be the procuring cause of our justification, either in time or in eternity; for they are the result of the first justification which is obtained by faith, and this has already been shewn to be legal in its nature, inasmuch as it is founded upon Christ's perfect satisfaction of the law, though evangelical in its operation towards us, because freely bestowed upon us through the redemption that is in his blood. And these being, in fact, no more than what our duty requires, neither can our second justification rest upon their intrinsic or exclusive merit. It is plain then that Mr Wesley was perfectly correct in saying, "The righteousness of Christ is the whole and sole foundation of all our hope."†

The sum of our argument upon this important question, therefore, is:—1st. God speaks the truth, and means what he says, when he promises to justify the believer in Jesus. 2d. That justification includes a declaration of the innocence and righteousness of the person and character justified, for these

* See this deep and interesting subject prophetically illustrated with all the lofty eloquence and sublime imagery of Oriental poetry; and in the inimitable style of the wisest of men, and greatest of monarchs. "Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vines flourish, whether the tender grapes appear, and the pomegranates put forth their buds: there will I give thee my loves." (Canticle vii. 12.)

† *Sermon on "The Lord our Righteousness."*

are the essential grounds upon which that blessing must rest. 3d. Having neither of these requisites in ourselves we are obliged to resort to the merits of another for their attainment. 4th. We find them redundant in the person and offices of our great Redeemer; and God imputes them to us for our justification. 5th. Embracing these by faith, we become the adopted children of God *, and the legitimate heirs of that salvation, which is the reward promised to immaculate innocence and the most perfect righteousness. 6th. Yet receiving this most important blessing by faith, it is evangelical in its operation, and freely gives us that glory and felicity which ten thousand years of our most perfect obedience could never have purchased. 7th. Being founded in the most perfect righteousness of Christ, it is at once permanent, legitimate, and indefeasible, having God for its author, the merits of his Son for its foundation, and the truth and faithfulness of the Spirit of God for its support and vindication."† Hence its immutable stability and eternal security to every genuine child of God, who asserts and maintains his exalted privileges by the exercise of faith, hope, and love, to the end of his mortal course.

* Romans, viii. 15.-17

† Surely we can never sufficiently admire and praise the astonishing combination of wisdom, goodness, and condescension in God, who, in opening this "new and living way" for our salvation, establishes our title to everlasting life, upon such an immutable and indefeasible basis. Lest our faith should stagger at a bare promise, flowing spontaneously from the goodness of God, he most graciously gives us a legitimate claim upon his

And now let us contemplate, with humble gratitude, this most valuable and important of all spiritual blessings. Let us admire this transcendent display of mercy, grace, and peace, so freely bestowed upon us through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. We shall find ample occasion to adopt the energetic language of St Paul, and exclaim with that holy apostle, "O! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"* In the divine plan of a sinner's justification, what a glorious display of all the perfections of the Deity do we behold, combining their energies in uniting his glory with the salvation of man! What unfathomable wisdom is here,—what astonishing condescension,—what matchless love,—what ineffable goodness,—what stupendous power! Rich, transcendently rich, as the inexhaustible treasures of his mercy are, yet he will not suffer the felicity of his redeemed children to repose even on this ample basis alone; but he gives them as it were, the additional security of a meritorious claim upon his justice and his truth, in the righteousness of his only begotten Son, the son of his love! In his person and in his offices every true believer can

justice also, for the possession of our eternal inheritance. He could not be just in withholding salvation from a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus does every glorious attribute in the divine nature centre in the merits of Christ, and unite their sacred energy in securing the salvation of his redeemed people.

* Romans, xi. 33.

"Read his title clear,
To mansions in the skies."

Built upon this rock, he can humbly, yet confidently claim his share in that inheritance, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away for ever; and rejoicing in the hope of that salvation,

"He bids adieu to every fear,
And wipes his weeping eyes."

He sees, in the person and offices of his great Redeemer, the pledge and security of his everlasting felicity, while his triumphant faith realises the glorious prospect, which a boundless eternity pours on his ravished soul!

Let us admire the sacred harmony which reigns in the divine attributes of our God, while he gives us, in the blessing of justification, an incontestible title to his everlasting kingdom. It is his glorious prerogative to impart innocence to a guilty soul; to all others this is a contradiction in terms. Yet this he does upon principles perfectly consonant to truth and justice. Guilty in ourselves, we have no possible claim upon, and no means of attaining that innocence which is essential to justification, for we "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* Hence every mouth is stopped, and all the world becomes guilty before God. Nay, we have seen that pardon itself cannot bestow this blessing

* Romans, iii. 19-23.

upon us, for *the confession of guilt*, is the proper foundation of pardon. Vicarious atonement, and the imputation of its merit, is the legitimate source from whence the wisdom of God hath derived, and through which he imparts innocence to us, as the previous ground of our justification.

We have seen also that righteousness is indispensably necessary to rest this privilege upon; for God condemns those who justify the wicked*. Righteousness, therefore, we must have, or for ever remain unjustified before God. But a sinner has no such thing in himself to plead; for the lip of truth hath declared, "There is none righteous, no not one."† Yet justification is obtained at the commencement of our christian course; and even before converting grace has healed the breaches which sin had made in our souls, even when we are as yet sinners. But it is the prerogative of God to "justify the ungodly."‡ To all others this would be a contradiction in terms; yet he doth it, and remains just: yea, his justice sanctions the act, "He is just and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."§ It is plainly then by the imputation of his righteousness that this is accomplished; like the patriarch of old || we obtain "the blessing," clothed in the garment of our elder brother. But this is not done by the deceit of our mother; we are invested with it by the truth and love of our heavenly Father, who in that garment recognises our title to glory, and

* Isaiah, v. 23. † Rom. iii. 10. ‡ Rom. iv. 5.
§ Rom. iii. 26. || Gen. xxvii. 5.-37.

we inherit that blessing which, by right of inheritance should have descended on our elder brother; nevertheless, having a sufficiency for both himself and us, he clothes us with the garment of his salvation, he spreads his skirt over our naked souls, and saith unto us, live!

But this is not a mere external covering; no, it enters into the soul, it purifies the heart, and makes us, "like the king's daughter, all glorious within." Let the Pharisee, therefore, go to the deeds of the law for his justification; but we will seek and find it in the blood and righteousness of a crucified Saviour.

In what capacity, then, do we become the legitimate heirs of eternal glory? "As pardoned rebels," says a captious Cynic*, who appears disgusted at the evangelical privileges of the sons of God. "As adopted sons, and as justified believers,"† say I in conjunction with St Paul. What, let us ask, has a pardoned rebel (considered only in that capacity,) to do with the inheritance of his sovereign's kingdom? Because, forsooth, he has escaped the gallows by the mercy of his prince, he must immediately aspire to a share of the throne! Repeating the very treason for which he had been just before sentenced to death! And no better title than this, it seems, can be allowed to the ransomed sons of God; to their glorious and incorruptible inheritance! No;

* One who is ranked among the preachers of the gospel. He may probably recollect his own words, and the bitterness with which he enforced them, both in the pulpit and out of it.

† Rom. viii. 14.-17. v. 1.—Gal. iv. 4.-7.

we say, let the pardoned rebel go, and make use of his restored liberty in meriting or conquering a kingdom for himself, if he can; but let him not presume to aspire to a share of his sovereign's throne, unless he can produce a better title to it than the mere remission of well-merited punishment, as the sanction of his pretensions.

Happily for us, God hath never separated the blessing of justification from the pardon of sin. Had he done so, that pardon would have been of little use to us. At the next temptation our guilt would have returned, and we should again have fallen under the condemnation of the law of God. Whereas, "being justified by faith," we have true, permanent, and constant "peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ;" yea, "Our peace floweth as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea."* And we can truly say, with St Paul, "there is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Jesus Christ, the law of the spirit of life having made them free from the law of sin and death;" the moral law having met that perfect satisfaction in the person and offices of the Son of God, which, owing to the weakness and infirmities of our flesh †, it could not obtain from any other branch of human nature.

It is to the solidity of the foundation on which it is erected, that the permanency of a believer's justification is to be ascribed. Hence this important blessing is not forfeited by the innumerable internal vio-

* Isaiah, xlviii. 18. † Rom. viii. 3.

lations of the law of love, and external deviations from perfect holiness, which are found in the hearts and lives of most professors of genuine religion. That these are real breaches of the divine law is unquestionable; each of them is sufficient to obliterate a previous pardon, and they all need the atoning blood of Christ, to wash away their stains from the conscience of the true believer. But inasmuch as they are involuntarily transgressions * of the law, they are not imputed to the believer as sins; and consequently, he does not thereby forfeit his justification, which, however, he must inevitably do, were that blessing suspended upon his own personal obedience, and not founded upon the imputation of a righteousness to him, incomparably more excellent and perfect than his own. This is the only ground upon which we can possibly vindicate the integrity of the divine government, in maintaining the justification of persons and characters whose conduct is chequered with unfaithfulness, and whose hearts are yet in a great degree carnal and impure.

The term justification being of legal and forensic import, and the judicious and proper application of it to the persons and characters of the redeemed children of God, not being susceptible of controversy upon any grounds which are themselves defensible, we feel ourselves obliged to admit the thing itself to be true; and by its use and mode of operation, which have been traced out in the preceding

* See Mr Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, and his Sermon "*On Sin in Believers.*"

pages, we find it can rest upon no foundation with respect to fallen man, either as penitent sinners or imperfect believers, but that of the imputation of righteousness to them, through the vicarious merits of their great Redeemer. But for the final justification of the saints, at the awful tribunal of their judge, although their works will unquestionably be produced as evidences of their faith and love*, yet these can have no share in the merit of their salvation; for they themselves are the result of the imputed merits of Jesus, and of the gracious operation of his spirit in their hearts.

* Yes, as evidences of their faith and love; for let it be carefully observed, that it is not the mere external action, but the principle from which they flow, that stamps a value upon the works of believers in Christ. The external act is as it were the body, which renders the disposition of the mind visible and tangible. But the disposition, the principle, is the soul of the action; the body perishes, but the soul is immortal: it is the heaven-born germ of salvation, which will expand its celestial foliage to imbibe the rays of the sun of righteousness in its native atmosphere, through the countless ages of a happy eternity. Here the seed is sown in a material and corruptible soil, and we perceive only, as it were, the blossoms of our future glory; these are now and then refreshed and nourished by occasional showers of divine grace, yet their progress is often impeded by the chilling blasts of temptation. But when transplanted to their celestial soil, and placed in the meridian of heavenly glory, the fruits of holiness will attain their full perfection, and flourishing under the culture of their adorable author, shall terminate in the universal echo of "praise, and honour, and salvation, and glory, to him, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, "and made us kings and priests to his father for ever and ever."

Before we close this section, it is but fair to state that Mr Wesley's sentiments, respecting the justification of believers, do not perfectly coincide with those which have been here proposed. Our great esteem for the person and talents of that venerable divine induces the highest respect for his authority, in points of doctrine; yet we are not thereby called to surrender either our judgments or sentiments in an implicit reception of the opinions even of Mr Wesley. We claim the unalienable right of private judgment, and, in the exercise of this, it is certain an uniformity of sentiment on this interesting point of doctrine does not exist in the Methodist connexion; it is a fair subject of discussion, one which demands our maturest deliberation, and, as far as it is practicable, a final and satisfactory decision.

The following extract from Mr Wesley's Sermon on Justification by Faith, will suffice to put us in possession of his opinions respecting the points which have been discussed in this section. Our judgments will be governed by that conviction, which truth, under the influence of the spirit of holiness, carries to every sincere and upright heart*.

"It is (says Mr Wesley) far easier to take for "granted, than to prove from any clear scripture "testimony, that justification is,—the clearing us "from the accusation brought against us by the "law†. At least if this forced unnatural way of

* John, vii. 17. xvi. 13.

† Here, with all due deference, we would beg leave to ask, if justification does not positively and *bona fide* "clear us from the accusation brought against us by the law;" what doth St

" speaking mean either more or less than this, that " whereas we have transgressed the law of God, and " thereby deserved the damnation of hell, God does " not inflict on those who are justified, the punish- " ment which they have deserved."

Here it is plain Mr Wesley would make justification nothing more than a mere exemption from deserved punishment; and he does not admit that it is even a positive, and much less a judicial " clearing us from the accusation brought against us by the law." But if so, is it not clear that this accusation still remains in full force against us, and that we are yet judicially liable to the curse of a broken law?* But how can this comport with the proper meaning of the term *justification?* Exemption from punishment is the natural consequence and proper effect of justification; but surely this is not justification itself! Indeed the very sentence which contains this objection admits the truth of the position it opposes.

" God (says Mr Wesley) does not inflict on those who are justified, the punishment they had deserved." Observe, " those who are justified!" Mr Wes-

Paul mean by saying, that " Christ hath blotted out the handwriting of our ordinances that was against us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross," (Col. ii. 14.) Let it not be said that this refers to the ceremonial law of Moses, for the Colossians never were the subjects of that law; but they were always under the obligations of the moral law (Romans, ii. 14.-15.) It follows, therefore, that their justification freed them from the accusation brought against them, by their breaches of the moral law; for " there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," (Rom. viii. 1.) either from the moral or the ritual law.

* Gal. iii. 10.

ley therefore admits, that justification is distinct from, and the procuring cause of their exemption from punishment. It comprehends the pardon of sin; and exemption from punishment is the natural result of these important blessings. And the truth of that scripture remains unimpeached, which declares, that believers in Christ are "justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."* Now it must be acknowledged, that the man who perfectly fulfilled the moral and ritual law of Moses, would be justified thereby†. But the justification of a believer in Christ is, in the passage above cited, declared to be more perfect, more complete than it could be, even by a perfect fulfilment of the whole moral and ritual law of Moses by any mere man! Why is this? The reason is plain: because, as has already been amply shewn from Mr Wesley's own authority as well as from scripture, the justification of a believer rests on the imputation of the immaculate righteousness of the Son of God. Without this, the use and application of the term to sinners would be absurd and contradictory in the highest degree, and of course totally incompatible with the wisdom and truth of God. But that wisdom and truth having adopted the term, it is surely more decorous in us to endeavour to vindicate and maintain it, than by reducing it to a mere exemption from punishment, to degrade and undermine it.

* Acts, xiii. 39.

† This is plain from Levit. xviii. 5.—Rom. ii. 7.-10. x. 5.—Gal. iii. 12.

Again; Mr Wesley proceeds, "Least of all does "justification imply that God is deceived in those "whom he justifies; that he thinks them to be in "fact what they are not, that he accounts them to "be otherwise than they are. It does by no means "imply, that God judges concerning us, contrary to "the real nature of things; that he esteems us better "than we really are, or believes us righteous when "we are unrighteous. Surely no. The judgment of "the all-wise God is always according to truth; nei-"ther can it ever consist with his unerring wisdom "to think that I am innocent, to judge that I am "righteous or holy, because another is so. He can "no more in this manner confound me with Christ, "than with David or Abraham."*

If Mr Wesley can here be supposed to be arguing against the vicarious character assumed by the Son of God, we must say that he has unhappily laboured to overturn a fundamental principle of the gospel, and even his high authority, would be found insufficient to support such a deviation from the truth of God, as it stands revealed in the inspired writings. And if he is here contending against the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to each believer for his justification, we must deeply lament the discrepance which such an argument, collated with his sermon on "The Lord our Righteousness," would present to our view, as well as its hostility to the gospel-plan of salvation, as we find it developed in the oracles of inspiration. But we must not

* Sermon "*On Justification.*"

rashly admit such a change as this against a venerable ambassador of God, and one who was the honoured instrument of the conversion and final salvation of thousands, upon those very principles which are maintained in this work.

We can therefore only suppose, that in the paragraph above cited, Mr Wesley intended to confute the absurd notion of a self-deception in the divine mind, and a confusion of persons in the doctrine of atonement; which would be at once degrading to the economy of grace, and contradictory to our reason. For in imputing the guilt of our sins to Christ, or the merit of his righteousness to us, God doth not confound the persons, or lose sight of the character of each party; but by his sovereign power he transfers the curse and punishment of our transgressions to the person of Christ (with his own consent,) to his judicial condemnation. And, in the same manner, he (with our consent, indicated by believing on him for redemption,) transfers to our account the perfect righteousness of his only begotten Son, to our judicial and evangelical justification *.

Neither is there any occasion to resort to the ab-

* Both these points are clearly demonstrated, and unequivocally established in 2 Cor. v. 21.—Gal. iii. 13.—Rom. x. 4.

This is precisely the doctrine promulgated by the judicious and pious Mr Baxter, in his "Aphorisms on justification." By republishing the substance of these, and recommending them to the people over whom he presided, Mr Wesley has both adopted these sentiments as his own, and interwoven them with the constitution of Methodism.

surd notion of a confusion of persons, for the establishment of the personal righteousness and holiness of a believer in Christ. For whatever they may have been in times past, the stains of all previous guilt are washed away in "the blood of Christ which cleanseth them from all sin,"* in the moment of their justification. And St Paul assures us that "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new! And all things are of God."† Again he informs us, that "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in them who, believing in Christ, walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law (the condemnation, the power, and dominion,) of sin and death."‡ And Mr Wesley himself asserts, that "the moment we are justified by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus, we are also born of the spirit." And a little farther he tells us also, that "this new birth consists in that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life; when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness;"§ that is, in the accurate language of St Paul, when "Christ is formed in them the hope of glory."‖

Hence we see that the justification here contended for does not involve any self-deception in the divine mind, nor is there any necessity for God to ima-

* 1 John, i. 7. † 2 Cor. v. 17. ‡ Rom. viii. 1.-4.
§ Sermon "*On the New Birth.*" ‖ Gal. iv. 19.

gine "I am innocent or righteous, because Christ is so;" but in the moment he justifies me, he gives me a new nature, which constitutes my soul, innocent, holy, and acceptable in his sight. And although this may not instantly prevail to the entire conquest of all the principles of that carnal mind* which long held me in subjection to the grievous yoke of sin, yet it is amply sufficient to entitle me to the character of "a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ;"† and under a faithful and diligent cultivation, to issue in my everlasting felicity.

We have now seen the nature of justification by faith in Jesus Christ; we have discovered the foundation on which it rests to be the righteousness of Christ: and we find that God is its author, and that it is ordained of him to furnish his children with a legal, as well as an evangelical title to salvation. Let the captious Pharisee, who will have his own righteousness to be the ground of his acceptance with God, continue to treat this holy doctrine with derision or contempt, and repose the hopes of his salvation upon his rotten foundation; but let the Methodist, true to his original principles, build on a surer foundation, even that tried stone which God hath laid in Zion for our redemption. We know that "whosoever believeth on him, with the heart unto righteousness, shall not perish, but have everlasting life!"‡

* See Mr Wesley's Sermon "*On Sin in Believers.*"

† Gal. iii. 26. ‡ John. iii. 16.

Section II.—*Of Regeneration.*

In commencing our researches into the nature and influence of regeneration, we enter upon a region of speculative divinity, which, without supernatural aid, we should in vain attempt to explore. Not only is the lamp of revelation requisite to guide our footsteps in this intricate path, but the particular influence and illumination of the spirit of God, and a considerable degree of experience in the ways of piety, are necessary to our forming true conceptions concerning this fundamental doctrine of the gospel of our salvation; for without their aid we shall find ourselves surrounded with impenetrable darkness, and be in danger of stumbling at the very threshold of christianity.

It was the want of these, that caused Nicodemus although a master in Israel, and taught this doctrine by the Son of God himself, so grossly to mistake both its nature and mode of operation, as to suppose it to consist in a repetition of natural and carnal birth. Deplorably erroneous as were the notions of this Jewish Rabbi, respecting regeneration, they are nevertheless a fair sample of those which possess the minds of the generality of mankind, who being earthly in their pursuits, and carnal in their attachments, are incapable of discerning the deep and, to them, mysterious doctrines connected with

* John, iii. 4.

the conversion of the soul to God, and its final salvation by the redemption that is in Jesus.

But this transaction, although illustrated by a natural event of a material nature, is altogether spiritual and intellectual in its process. And the natural man, not having the eyes of his understanding yet enlightened, can form no adequate conception of the nature or properties of a change to which he is a total stranger; although described to him in the plainest language, he is still unable to comprehend it. Our Lord in his reply to Nicodemus intimated this as the cause of his mistake. He assures him that it was a spiritual birth, and not a natural one of which he spake; adding, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the spirit is spirit."* As if he had said,—every offspring partakes of the nature of its progenitor; flesh and blood are generated among mankind, but he that is born from above, born of God, partakes of a celestial nature; it is holy, and spiritual, and divine.

Now as God is the sole author of regeneration; as it is conducted throughout, and finally consummated by the energy of his holy spirit; it is plain we cannot pretend to a full comprehension either of the essential nature of the change here spoken of, or of the mode by which it is accomplished. "The wind (saith Jesus) bloweth where it listeth; thou hearest the sound thereof, but thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every

* John, iii. 6.

one that is born of the spirit."* But although we cannot define the essence of this change, yet we are able, by the light of revelation, and the influence of that spirit who is its divine author, to ascertain some of the circumstances, to describe many of the marks and tokens, and to trace out a portion of the privileges, which characterise and distinguish this happy and glorious introduction to the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Passing by, therefore, the ignorance and carnality of those who imagine "the new birth" to consist in *water baptism* alone †, we proceed to consider it in the light in which revelation and the experience of the children of God have placed it. And first, Jesus Christ hath declared in the most solemn manner, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."‡

* John, iii. 16.

† Although it is certain the Church of England does not hold, that external baptism and inward regeneration are synonymous terms; yet she undoubtedly inculcates, that they are simultaneous in their operation. In the ritual for the "public baptism of infants," we find the priest is enjoined at the conclusion of the ceremony, to "give God thanks that it hath pleased him to *regenerate* the infant, to receive him for his own child *by adoption*, and to incorporate him into the holy church." Pedobaptism certainly can do no harm; but inasmuch as it is without either precept or example in scripture, the accuracy of limiting regeneration to this ceremony may be very justly questioned. Mr Wesley appears to have supposed regeneration to be uniformly connected with, though certainly not entirely limited to baptism.

‡ John, iii. 3.

And again, "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*. Many are the commentaries which have been made on these important and emphatic words. The substance of those which are generally propagated and sanctioned in the Methodist societies will be found in the following extracts from the works of some of the ablest writers that connexion has produced.

In the Rev. Mr Wesley's sermon upon this particular subject, we find the following summary of the doctrine.

"The new birth is that great change which God "works in the soul, when he brings it into life; "when he raises it from the death of sin into the "life of righteousness. It is the change wrought "in the whole soul, by the almighty spirit of God, "when it is created anew in Christ Jesus, when it "is "renewed after the image of God in righteous-"ness and true holiness," when the love of the world

* John iii. 5.—It is highly probable, that although *elementary water* may be here included, as "the outward and visible sign" of regeneration; yet that the cleansing influences of the holy spirit are primarily meant by the expression of *water* in the text. In Matt. iii. 11. it is said of Christ, that he should baptise his disciples "with the Holy Ghost, and with *fire*." Here the element fire is evidently used in a figurative sense, signifying probably the powerful energy of that holy spirit when subduing and melting down the stubborn hearts of obstinate and rebellious sinners. So also, in the preceding passage, *water* may prefigure the more genial and purifying influences of grace upon the yielding hearts of genuine penitents.—(See this subject further elucidated, John, iv. 14.)

" is changed into the love of God, pride into humili-
" ty ; passion, (anger,) into meekness ; hatred, envy,
" malice, into sincere, tender disinterested, love for
" all mankind. In a word, it is that change where-
" by the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, is turned
" into the mind which was in Christ Jesus."

The reverend and pious Mr Fletcher describes it in much the same manner; his expressions, however, are somewhat varied.

" It is, (saith he,) that great change by which a
" man passes from a state of nature to a state of
" grace. His natural birth had made him like to
" fallen Adam, the old man, against whom God had
" pronounced the sentence of death. But his spi-
" ritual birth makes him like to Jesus Christ ; to
" the new man, which is created according to God
" in righteousness and true holiness. He was born
" a child of wrath, proud, sensual, and unbelieving ;
" but by regeneration, he is become a child and an
" heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. He is
" in Christ a new creature ; all the powers and fa-
" culties of his soul are renovated. In a word,
" Christ liveth in him, and he can say, " The life I
" now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son
" of God who loved me and gave himself for
" me."* &c. &c.

* See Fletcher's *Discourse on the New Birth ;* originally written in French, translated by Henry Moore (Dub. 1799.)

To the testimony of these illustrious commentators, now gone to their eternal reward, let us add the no less accurate elucidation of Doctor Adam Clarke, whose theological researches and religious labours will prove a blessing to mankind, probably

Now it is evident, that the entire process of regeneration proceeds upon the presupposed fall, depravity, and corruption of human nature. But inasmuch as this hath been shewn to be variously understood in the Methodist connexion; so also is the doctrine of regeneration variously described among us. For some suppose there is found in every man who is in a salvable state, though in fact unconverted, the fundamental principle of that conversion, which only requires cultivation and improvement to terminate in the production of every fruit of holiness requisite to salvation, and issue in the final attainment of eternal life. This, indeed, they ascribe to the grace and love of God flowing to man, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; but in a kind of general way, and much in the same manner as the natural gifts and faculties of soul and body are derived from the same source. In short, they appear to believe that every man possesses what may properly be termed *a natural power* to obey the divine commandments, to repent of their sins, and believe the gospel at his pleasure; the spirit of God being always ready (so far as his influence may be necessary,) to co-operate with

while the world standeth. "The *New Birth* here spoken of, comprehends not only what is termed justification or pardon, but also sanctification or holiness. Sin must be pardoned, and the impurity of the heart washed away, before any soul can enter into the kingdom of God. As the *New Birth* implies the renewing of the whole soul in righteousness and true holiness, it is not a matter that may be dispensed with. Heaven is a place of holiness, and nothing but what is like itself can ever enter into it." *(Clarke's Commentary on this passage.)*

the sinner, and *assist him* in the work of conversion. But it would appear, from this system of doctrine, that by far the greater part of the work rests with the sinner himself, who, it seems, has it completely in his power to become a saint whenever he pleases; only in consideration of the foolish and sinful habits he has long indulged, it will necessarily be a work of some time and labour to get his heart thoroughly converted to the ways of truth and holiness. No extraordinary degree of divine influence, however, is to be expected, or is indeed supposed to be requisite to effect the great work of conversion; and accordingly it is a principle held by the favourers of this doctrine, "That God, prompted by his own goodness, hath already done all that he possibly can do, consistently with his own glory, for the present happiness and final salvation of every human creature upon earth; and that consequently no farther interference of divine power* or influence need

* The writer of this, in close conversation with a preacher who holds sentiments similar to those above described, has been told *point blank*, "That God never converted any man; that if we could prove that he ever converted one soul, we should thereby lay all the blame of the unconversion, and consequent destruction of every man who finally perishes, at God's door; who, it is plain, has given a proof by the conversion of that one man, that he could, if he pleased, with equal ease convert and save the whole world, which, it is plain he has not done: and that this would both be a libel upon his goodness, and would completely establish the doctrines of election and reprobation." Hence it plainly follows, that all prayers for the conversion of individuals or nations, are nugatory, nay rather insulting; inasmuch as that they would imply, 1st, that God had not already

be expected to effect the conversion of any individual; although, as the divine spirit is omnipresent, and is in fact the *primum mobile* of all physical, intellectual, and moral power in the universe, his aid in a general way cannot be excluded, particularly as it is admitted, that "God is loving to every man, and his tender mercy is over all his works."

These sentiments are supported by arguments drawn from scripture and reason. For the first, it is said, "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."* This is supposed to prove that every man is constantly under such a degree of divine influence, as is fully adequate, in conjunction with his own exertions, to enable him, if he pleases, to secure his salvation upon the gospel terms of faith and obedience. The concurrence of his own will being the grand point to be attained; and that of this faculty every man has the entire and uncontrolled disposal.

done all he could do towards the attainment of that end; and, 2dly, that the determinations of the divine mind were subject to alterations, at the intreaties or persuasions of men. And this consequence being urged as the necessary result of the preceding principles, it was acquiesced in by their supporter; who, however, subsequently admitted, that in answer to earnest solicitation, a longer space of time might possibly be given, wherein a sinner might have opportunity to repent if he pleased: but all supernatural or extraordinary influence of grace, as the efficient cause of conversion, was totally denied as equally incompatible with the integrity of the divine nature, and the freedom of the human will. This is indeed driving our Arminian principles to a great extent, but probably not farther than they will fairly admit of.

* Job, xxxii. 8.

It is, say they, upon these principles that the commandments of God are indiscriminately issued to all mankind, and which necessarily implies a power in each individual to keep and fulfil those commandments, otherwise it would be but a mere mockery in God to enjoin their performance. That accordingly when God said to the Jews by his prophet*, "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well," &c. it implies that all men have the power of conversion inherent in themselves; and that this, and this only, is the legitimate mode of obtaining reconciliation with God, under the Christian, as well as the Jewish dispensation. For St James hath also said, "Cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts ye double minded."† Reasoning thus upon the subject, they say, God is unchangeably the same; he ever did, and ever will hate sin, and therefore the man who comes to him, and expects to find favour with him, must put away all sin both inward and outward; he must bring with him "clean hands and a pure heart," as the indispensable condition of a favourable reception with a God of infinite holiness, and of unspotted purity.

How far these and similar principles which appear to be rapidly gaining ground in the Methodist connexion, at least in Ireland, do or do not comport with what is usually styled "The gospel plan of salvation," or whether, if those legal terms and conditions of salvation, are found incompatible with the evangelical principles of the New Testament dis-

* Isaiah, i. 16,-17. † James, iv. 8.

pensation, it might be most adviseable to abandon these last, and recur to the old Jewish plan of reformation, in preference to the short and easy method of redemption proposed in the gospel of Christ; the writer of this does not here take upon him to determine. He submits these questions to the wisdom and piety of his brethren, and particularly to those whose rank and office in the connexion render them the legitimate censors and guardians of the doctrines taught amongst us. But as the subject is one of the very first importance to the interests of the church of God, it appears to demand serious investigation, and prompt decision.

At first view, those principles would seem to militate against the common opinion, that all mankind are dead in trespasses and in sins, destitute both of the power and inclination either to love or serve God, being in fact without God, without faith, without hope, and without love; and that consequently the particular and special exertion of divine grace and power is absolutely necessary in behalf of every soul of man, to accomplish his conversion, and restore him to the image and favour of God, without which the man must remain as he was, alienated in heart and life from God, treading the broad road to destruction, totally helpless, hopeless, miserable, and, to all intents and purposes, a damned man in the esteem of God*.

* These sentiments are unquestionably the basis of the doctrines originally propagated by the Methodist preachers, and may be traced through all the primitive writings of Mr Wesley, particularly in his Sermons, Notes on the New Testament, and

The latter sentiments are certainly the most prevalent in the connexion at present, so far as they apply to the states of adults, who it is readily acknowledged have "all sinned and come short of the glory of God." So far as the question concerns the regeneration of infants, it bears a very different aspect, as we shall soon perceive. As they are incapable of actual transgression, so their imbecile minds are disqualified for the perception or improvement of regenerating grace. But the intellectual powers of an adult are susceptible of that process which appears necessary to the accomplishment of the great and important work of regeneration, and which evidently requires the co-operation of all the powers of the soul. The understanding must be convinced of the necessity of conversion, as a prelude to salvation; the passions must be wrought upon by the fear of eternal punishment on the one hand, and the hope of everlasting life on the other, in order to produce repentance and sorrow for sin, which terminates in abandoning the yoke of Satan,

Hymns. All these, more or less, contain the sentiment expressed in these strong lines of the Rev. Charles Wesley:

> "Damned, till by Jesus saved thou art,
> Till Jesus' blood hath washed thy heart,
> Thou canst not find the gate of heaven!"

Whether Mr John Wesley subsequently departed in any degree from his first principles; and whether, in particular, by the publication of the celebrated minutes of 1770, he inadvertently laid the foundation of principles hostile to the true evangelical doctrines of grace, under the christian dispensation, will be the subject of future inquiry.

and an uniform dedication of the powers of soul and body to the service and glory of God. The judgment must approve of the plan of salvation proposed for its adoption; the will must determine on the acceptance of redemption, on the terms laid down in the gospel; while the affections embrace the promises, and by an act of vigorous faith the man receives a sensible communication of the pardoning love of God, which is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him,—thus obtaining redemption in the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of his sins, he truly rejoices in hope of the glory of God. And walking thenceforward in the commandments of his God and Saviour, under the influence of his grace and holy spirit, the true believer is enabled to perfect holiness in the fear and love of God; and, persevering in the paths of righteousness, his faith and loving obedience are ultimately crowned with glory, honour, and eternal life.

This process appears both scriptural and rational. It comports with our best views of the divine nature, and of the glorious plan of salvation, as founded in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and developed in the oracles of inspiration. We see its beauty, we admire its consistency, and acknowledge it every way worthy of its great author, admirably calculated to advance the glory of our great Redeemer, and exactly suited to the necessities of his redeemed people.

But how can this or any thing similar to it be applied to, or accomplished in the tender and imbecile minds of infants? And yet on the popular prin-

ciples, which ascribe the propagation of sin to human nature, would not some such process appear indispensably necessary? Can a being, the essence of whose nature is contaminated with hereditary guilt and moral pollution, be eligible to the joys of heaven? A legitimate heir of that glory, for which absolute and perfect holiness is an indispensable qualification; and to which positive righteousness is the only acknowledged title? No: It is evident, in that state, no infant can be eligible to everlasting life. Admitting its initial redemption from the imputed guilt of Adam's transgression, and from the curse entailed on his posterity by his act of disobedience, to be complete,—it yet remains to shew how the infant's mind is purged from the pollution of hereditary corruption, and whence it derives that righteousness of person and character which alone can constitute it an eligible and legitimate heir of immortal glory.

In the consideration of this question, three points of importance present themselves to our view, demanding our decision. We presuppose an infant born of degenerate parents, having a corrupt and malignant nature, under a curse of disobedience, and without the shadow of a qualification for immortal felicity. This infant we nevertheless confess to be an undoubted heir of glory, and dying in a state of absolute imbecility and insensibility, its happy spirit is ushered by angels into the presence of its God.—The three points then to be attained are, Redemption from curse, as the foundation of exemption from punishment; Holiness of nature,

as a qualification for celestial enjoyment; and the ascription of Righteousness as the title to eternal life.

For the first of these, viz. Redemption from curse, we are fully agreed that, "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." The great atoning sacrifice of Christ initially redeems all the posterity of Adam from the imputed guilt of his transgression. The second, Holiness of nature, involves some doubt, and upon this we divide. As it hath already been shewn in a preceding section, a large majority of our people zealously contend (as if the glory of God and the present and eternal felicity of the souls of infants were inseparably connected with it,) for the uniform propagation of hereditary corruption in human nature*. While some others, but few in com-

* As our object is not to foster prejudice, but to ascertain and vindicate truth, it is highly necessary in the investigation of any point of doctrine, to turn it on every side, to look at it in all its bearings, and with patience and candour to appreciate its real merit by the acknowledged criterions of orthodoxy. With this view let us put to ourselves the questions which follow.—If, as is generally supposed, original sin, propagated as an active principle in the soul, be the efficient cause of the universal prevalence of evil, will not this exonerate mankind from much of the responsibility which would otherwise attach to their dispositions and actions, as moral agents in a state of probation? For really if our nature be radically evil, or if evil be so closely interwoven with its fabric as is generally believed, it would appear unreasonable to expect any good fruit from so corrupt a tree. Yet we find God both expects and demands it (See Jer. ii. 2.—Isaiah, v. 4.)

We say the infant is overwhelmed with a domineering bias to evil, pervading and subjecting all his intellectual and moral

parison, venture to stem the tide of popular opinion, or perhaps of popular prejudice; and presume to think it possible that all the apparent depravity found in human nature, may be the result merely of the impossibility of propagating either the knowledge or the love of God, or the wisdom and experience requisite to acquire or retain either of these divine blessings, for the want of which the expanding powers of the infantile mind, however innocent

powers; yet we expect him to love and serve God! Does this present a fair state of probation, such as we might expect from the equity, the goodness, and the mercy of God? Can a helpless indiscriminating infant change his nature, or can he act in direct opposition to it? Certainly not! Where then should the blame of his cupidity be laid? Upon Adam? No; by no means. No, not even if we could prove the actual and regular propagation of sin in all its malignity from Adam to ourselves. For God took up human nature in its fallen estate instantly upon the first transgression, and he then undertook its redemption from the guilt and power of sin. The responsibility therefore, of propagating a species overwhelmed with moral evil, is taken off our first parents, and if fixed any where, must rest with God! But the question then arises, Was not God bound by his well-known attributes as the wise and gracious governor of the universe, either to extract the poison of sin from the human soul (if ever it were susceptible of propagation,) or to extinguish the species at once? which, if the propagation of sin could not be prevented, would appear by far the most merciful and the wisest plan! I know a preacher, a man of first rate understanding and talents, who objected to marrying on this very ground. He thought he should be the instrument of propagating creatures alienated from God in their original state; and that, therefore, the chance of their salvation was too small to justify the risk of propagation! His conclusion was surely justified by his premises, but his premises wanted proof.

or holy in its origin, must of necessity (without a miraculous interposition,) be led away and subdued by the subtle temptations and powerful allurements with which its enfeebled nature is every where assailed.

The scriptures no where speak positively either of the original corruption, or of the regeneration of infants. But we know from their exposure to sufferings

But a remedy is supposed to be provided for this direful contagion of sin, in the grace of God infused into the minds of infants. A remedy methinks ought to cure the disease, to entitle it to that name. But does this infused grace eradicate the disease of corruption from the human soul? You perceive it does not; for sinful dispositions still appear, and sinful actions result from them. But what is the nature of this grace, and what is its mode of operation? Does it spontaneously transform the soul into the divine image; or does it merely exhibit the excellency of virtue to the understanding, and propose its practice to the will, without pretending to influence the choice? Does it convince the judgment, and engage the affections in the service of religion? You know the mind of an infant is incapable of this rational and discriminating process. If, therefore, grace requires such a rational and moral process to give it effective influence, it is plain it cannot operate upon the minds of new-born infants, to accomplish in them that regeneration, which, under the idea of hereditary sin, would be indispensably necessary to their salvation.

Hence it is plain that if the work of regeneration is requisite to qualify an infant for the enjoyment of the kingdom of God (which, however, it would be difficult to prove from scripture, John, iii. 3.-5. evidently applying only to adults;) but if it be requisite for infants, it must proceed upon principles entirely different from those by which an adult experiences that blessing. In fact, it must operate in a way altogether mysterious and incomprehensible to us, seeing revelation is totally silent upon the point. But it appears at least more rational to believe, that the

and sorrow, and their liability to death, that they are involved in at least a part of the curse of Adam; they partake of all the natural evil inflicted on the human race in consequence of his transgression. But original sin formed no part of that curse. God never inflicted sin as a punishment on any of his creatures; to assert this would be to make God directly the

moral corruption of an intelligent Being, placed in a state of probation, and under a covenant of redemption, should rather be ascribed to the voluntary perversion of its rational powers in concurrence with temptation, than to any imposed depravity inherent in its nature. And so also it would appear most congruous to the divine economy of grace, that the regeneration of that being, should be accomplished by its own consent, and through the co-operation of its moral faculties. From these considerations we perceive that the doctrines of hereditary corruption, and the regeneration of infants, are burthened with difficulties insuperable to finite capacities, and involved in a shade of obscurity, impenetrable by any powers that we are possessed of. To decide upon the point is therefore beyond our sphere; yet it appears reasonable to believe, from the degree of evidence we possess, either that sin, as a positive principle, is not susceptible of propagation, or, if susceptible of it, that the atoning merits of Christ interposing, extracts the moral poison from the germ of human nature, and infuses those qualities into every soul of man in its initial state, which we know are requisite to prepare it for the enjoyment of that kingdom, of which it is the legitimate and acknowledged heir. That is, the seed of eternal life, which, if the infant die in that state, will expand, bloom, and flourish in the happier soil of the celestial regions, through a glorious eternity; but, if spared to encounter the blasts of temptation in this "howling wilderness" of earth, it may sink under the unequal contest, and leave its once happy subject, a prey to all the horrors of guilt, pollution, and misery! Then, indeed, a total regeneration becomes indispensably necessary to salvation.

author of sin,* which is blasphemy of the highest rank: and it is but one step below this to assert, that he permits its propagation in the hearts of his redeemed children, who are the heirs of salvation. Therefore, it yet remains for the advocates of this doctrine to demonstrate its consistency with the wisdom, goodness, and holiness of the divine nature. For if God hath done this, it must be either willingly or unwillingly; if willingly, then he wishes for, and delights in that pollution, misery, and damnation of his rational creatures, which is supposed to be derived from this prolific source; but if unwillingly, then is God unable to save his redeemed offspring from the dominion of sin and Satan, and the covenant of redemption fails in its foundation.

But we must not rashly impute discrepances of this kind to the divine nature. God is a being of inconceivable perfection; and his love of holiness, the propagation of which is so intimately connected

* The following passage is extracted from the works of the Rev. Mr Fletcher. In what part of the writings of that venerable divine it originally appeared, the author has not been able to ascertain; but he finds it cited in a controversial essay in the *Methodist Magazine* for October 1810, (Dub. edit. p. 454.) "If sin (said Mr Fletcher,) is a real thing, or a positive moral crookedness of the will of a sinner, and, as such, has a positive cause, can that positive cause be any other than the self-perversion of free will, or the impelling decree of a sin-ordaining God?" Certainly not. And therefore it cannot be susceptible of propagation. And when St Paul says, (Rom. v. 19.) "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners," he cannot mean that those many were forced into the actual commission of sin by the disobedience of Adam, but merely, 1st, That they were subjected to part of the penalties due to the transgression

with his own glory, united with his tender compassion for the human race, certainly justify the presumption, that he would be led by those divine attributes to permit the propagation of the human species, under such circumstances only, as would have the happiest tendency to facilitate their salvation, and promote their temporal and eternal felicity, and at the same time exhibit the glorious perfections of his own nature to the best advantage; thereby gratifying (if we may be allowed the expression,) the benignity and purity of his own mind, and exciting the just praise and well-founded admiration of angels and men. How far the propagation of sin is calculated to promote these views, it behoves the zealous advocates of that doctrine to shew.

From the testimony of revelation, however, we are certain, that Jesus sanctified the state of infancy by passing through it himself; and as his life and death have already been proved to be entirely vicarious, it is plain he hath meritoriously purchased

of their first parents, as being his lineal posterity; and, 2dly, That they were thereby placed in such a situation of debility, exposure, and general peccability, as rendered them still more liable to be seduced into actual transgression than even their first parents were, when invested with their original purity, wisdom, and fortitude. But to counteract, as it were, even this state of danger and distress, he immediately adds what fixes the sense of the words as above described: "So by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Not forced into actual righteousness, but redeemed from the curse entailed by sin on the posterity of Adam, and initially justified before a righteous and holy God, through the redeeming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

everlasting life for the innocent offspring of Adam*. Conscious of this, our blessed Lord scruples not to produce these redeemed souls, as the first fruits of his divine mediation. He honoured infants by permitting them to be the first martyrs, who suffered in his righteous cause; and he hesitates not to exhibit them as the specimens of his redeeming grace, and patterns of that nature, which is essential to the enjoyment of his eternal kingdom.

But although infants are redeemed from the curse in which, as the posterity of fallen and disobedient parents, they were involved, and are possessed of such a nature and such capacities, however they may acquire them, as qualify them for the enjoyment of

* In the venerable and pious Mr Fletcher's "*Last Check, or Polemical Essay,*" we find the following note on this subject. "Between Adamic and Christian perfection, we place the gracious innocence of little children! They are not only full of peccability, like Adam, but debilitated in all their animal and rational faculties, and, of consequence, fit to become an easy prey to every temptation, through the weakness of their reason, and the corruption of their concupiscible and irascible powers. Nevertheless, till they begin personally to prefer moral evil to moral good, we may consider them as graciously innocent. I say graciously innocent, because if we consider them in the seed of the fallen Adam, we find them naturally the children of wrath, and under the curse; but if we consider them in the seed of the woman, which was promised to Adam and to his posterity, we find them graciously placed in a state of redemption and evangelical salvation. For the free gift, which is come upon all men to justification, belongs first to them, Christ having sanctified infancy first. And therefore we do not scruple to say after our Lord, "of such is the kingdom of heaven." Now, the kingdom of heaven is not of sinners *as sinners*, but as little children, as being innocent through the free gift; or of adults, as being peni-

celestial glory; still their title to that glory must be sought for in a deeper fountain than we have yet explored. The atoning blood of their great Redeemer washes them from the imputed guilt of Adam's transgression, and rescues them from the vengeance of an offended judge, who, in the death of the transgressor, seeks the vindication of his righteous law. And his gracious and holy spirit at some period or other, unquestionably imparts to them those qualifications which are indispensably necessary for enjoying the society of heaven, and intercourse with the fountain of life and salvation; that immortal felicity of the redeemed in the kingdom of their God and Father. But both these might exist

tent, that is, turned from their sins to Christ." (*Polemical Essay*, Section 2.)

Here the title of infants to eternal life, is clearly and accurately stated, and it is laid on its proper foundation. But Mr Fletcher had imbibed the popular notion of the propagation of sin. Hence he speaks of the (hereditary) "corruption of their concupiscible and irascible powers." But Mr F. gives us no clue to discover how dying infants are delivered from this "corruption," which is certainly incompatible with a full qualification for the kingdom of God. As the very able arguments of this essay completely demonstrate the necessity of perfect holiness in order to salvation, and at the same time reprobate the idea of a death-purgatory,—it is somewhat extraordinary, that that zealous advocate for christian perfection in adults should have left those infantile heirs of salvation in the mire of sensual corruption and spiritual depravity, without the slightest intimation of a way for their escape? The truth of God, which declares that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," applies equally to infants as to adults. How the former are to attain this holiness, while their hearts are full of hereditary corruption, is the grand question which yet remains unanswered.

without any feasible claim on the joys of heaven. As in the case of adults, so in that of infants also, redemption from curse merely exonerates them from punishment. And holiness of nature is a privilege derived from that redemption; it is itself an important and invaluable blessing, carrying with it its own reward in the present felicity which it imparts to its happy possessor: and this demands the endless tribute of thanksgiving and praise to the author of every good and perfect gift *.

Allowing, therefore, redemption from curse and holiness of nature their full effect in promoting our final salvation, we ask, What do they do for us? They merely place us again on even ground with our adversaries, they restore to us that innocence and holiness which were lost by our first parents, and by them forfeited on behalf of their posterity. They put us in a capacity for working out our own salvation upon gospel principles, by a dedication of the

* That infants still personally suffer sickness, pain, and death, in consequence of their descent from those on whom those pains were originally inflicted, is too obvious to be controverted. But these sufferings are not now penal in their operation upon infants, nor marks of God's present displeasure against them. On the contrary, they are "blessings in disguise," for, under the covenant of redemption and grace, they all work together for good to those legitimate heirs of salvation. Above all, death is requisite to their admission to glory, seeing "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Therefore, this corruptible body must put on incorruption, and this mortal must be exchanged for immortality, and then shall be brought to pass in them the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory!" (1 Cor. xv. 50,-54.)

united powers of soul and body to the glory of God. For God indeed hath promised "eternal life to those who, by a patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality."* But failing in this, neither our initial redemption from the curse of Adam's transgression, nor our restoration to the image of God, would avail for our final salvation, or give us a title to the kingdom of glory. But dying infants do fail in the performance even of that evangelical condition of eternal salvation†. Not indeed voluntarily, but providentially; God by his providence cutting them off from the opportunity of thus working out their own salvation, even on the most evangelical principles. It therefore appears to be incumbent upon his goodness and truth, in the full accomplishment of the blessings entailed on the posterity of Adam by the covenant of redemption, to provide those objects of his tender love with such a title to glory, as can not only be recognised by his wisdom and mercy, but sanctioned by his truth and justice.

* Rom. ii. 7.

† It is generally supposed, that infants dying in that state possess a vast advantage over those who are spared to years of maturity, because the salvation of the former is secured upon a foundation which cannot fail; whereas that of the latter is upon Arminian principles (and these the Methodists have generally embraced,) a most precarious and uncertain thing. Upon that scheme, the hope of the future salvation of any human being is suspended principally upon the rectitude of the will, the integrity of the heart, and fidelity of the life of each individual. The grace of God indeed is admitted as laying the foundation in the mediation of Christ, upon which the efficacy of these virtues reposes. But this does not supersede their necessity to salvation.

And this, if we do not greatly mistake the gospel plan of salvation, God hath done in the personal righteousness of their vicarious head and representative Jesus Christ. Incapable indeed of apprehending this by their incipient mental powers, or of embracing it by an act of faith, God imputes that righteousness to them for their justification, which establishes their claim on the joys of an endless felicity; and Jesus himself confirms it in those remarkable words, founded on the merits of his own immaculate and righteous life, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."* For if when these offspring of a degenerate stock, contained in the loins of their fallen parents, were judicially esteemed as the enemies of God, and as such subjected to a curse; if, even in that state of initial guilt and condemnation, they were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being so reconciled, they shall be saved by his life†. For in his life as

Now, admitting the universal depravity and corruption of human nature in its original state, none of these virtues can spontaneously flow from it, but the reverse of them all. Yet St Paul seems to argue (Rom. ii. 14,-15.) that there is a power inherent in the human soul of conscientious fidelity, adequate to the production of that righteousness, which under the Gentile dispensation would issue in final salvation. Let us observe, that St Paul expressly ascribes this to their nature; they "do *by nature* the things contained in the law." From whence it would appear, that the evils prevalent in the world are the result rather of our extreme peccability, than of a positively corrupt nature, propagated with our animal frame.

* John, xvii. 24. † Romans, v. 10.

well as in his death, are the living members of Christ deeply interested for their title to glory.

From what has been said upon this subject, it would appear evident that the regeneration of infants, if necessary to their salvation, and practicable upon the dormant and enveloped powers of their imbecile minds, must proceed upon principles to which we are altogether strangers; and which consequently lie beyond the sphere of our rational powers to discuss. But as the divine agency cannot be excluded from the propagation of the human species, it is most congenial to our reason, and most honourable to the Deity to suppose, he would by virtue of "the redemption that is in Jesus," retrace upon every human soul in its actual formation, and while yet the embryo of future existence, the lineaments of his own lovely image; thus constituting them meet and eligible subjects of that inheritance in glory, which is purchased for them by the son of his love.

The regeneration of adults is quite another question, and almost entirely unconnected with that of infants. In speaking of this important and necessary change, we tread on sure ground. The words of the Son of God already cited, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," establish the fact beyond the possibility of controversy. And this is fully confirmed by the universal corruption of all mankind. For as it was in the days of Noah, so it has been ever since, and will be while the present state of things exist. Still, as all flesh have corrupted, so they will corrupt their ways upon the

earth*. But then, they do this themselves; they must not lay the blame of their corruption either upon God or upon Adam. If the Antideluvians could have urged the propagation of sin as a domineering power in their souls, as the efficient cause of their rebellion against God, their righteous judge could not have been just in the infliction of that signal punishment wherewith he visited their enormous crimes. Nor could he with truth and justice have charged their corruption home upon themselves, as he hath expressly done. "All flesh, (saith the inspired author,) *had corrupted his way* upon the earth."

St Paul, in his epistle to the Romans†, gives us a true and lively picture of this universal corruption; yet in it he throws not out the slightest hint that it proceeded from hereditary vice, but altogether from the voluntary abuse of those powers, and the wilful extinction of that light, by which the true knowledge of God, and of the ways of piety, was once conveyed to their souls. It was they themselves who perversely "changed the truth of God into a lie." But were these people, who may be taken as a fair sample of the heathen world, totally void of all spiritual life, destitute both of the inclination and power to return to God, to reclaim their hearts, reform their lives, and thus reconciling themselves to a God of mercy and truth, obtain a full restoration to the favour and image of their creator? If they were capable of doing this upon heathenish principles, unaided by

* Genesis, vi. 12. † Romans, i. 18.-32.

the light of revelation, and without any knowledge of the person or offices of the only mediator between God and man, "the man Christ Jesus," then their case was not altogether desperate; they still were within the reach of mercy, upon principles suited to the dark dispensation under which they lived.

But whatever possibility there might have been of their restoration to the favour and image of God, yet according to the testimony of scripture, there appeared small probability of such an event ever taking place. Witness the language of St Paul addressed to men who had been in precisely similar circumstances, when the regenerating power of divine grace visited them, as the day spring from on high; and the Son of Righteousness arose upon their diseased souls with healing in his wings. "Remember, (saith he to the believers at Ephesus) that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." And again, "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the spirit which worketh in the children of disobedience, in the lusts of the flesh, and were, by nature*, the children of wrath even as

* Nature here means the habit, practice, and example of their former course of life; but St Paul does not assert that they were born *children of wrath;* for all men are born under a covenant of redemption, in the favour of God, justified by the blood and righteousness of Christ, and heirs of his eternal kingdom.

others,"* &c. And again "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their hearts; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness†.

Such is the picture which an inspired apostle has drawn of unregenerated men: and these are essentially the same in every age and country, whether under the Jewish, the Heathen, or the Christian dispensation. Now if these persons are not totally deprived of all spiritual power to break off their sins and return to God, if every particle of divine grace is not expunged from their hearts, and every spark of the life of God extinguished in their souls, (which many will contend is the case,) yet still it must be confessed, the powers of their souls are torpid and paralysed by the power of sin, their understandings are so darkened, and their judgments so infatuated by the influence of Satan, that neither power nor inclination are apparent in them to break off their sins, to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with the heart unto righteousness. Their souls if not physically dead, are nevertheless morally and spiritually dead to God, and lying under the sentence of eternal

So in Romans, ii. 14. (as noticed above,) we read of those faithful heathens who did "by nature" the things contained in the law of God. These persons being faithful to the light of their dispensation, were witnesses of the power of redeeming grace manifested in them, without any explicit knowledge either of the law of Moses or the gospel of Christ.

* Ephesians, ii. 1.-3.-12. † Ephesians, iv. 18.-19.

death. If spiritual life is not entirely extinct, it is so completely dormant and inert, that its possessor is insensible of its existence, and consequently uninfluenced by its operation.

Now the question recurs, Are these men susceptible of regeneration, and upon what principles does that divine process take place in their souls? Is there yet concealed in their deserted sin-sick souls, the latent seed of a future reformation of heart and life; the germ of an ultimate salvation, which only awaits the vivifying beams of the sun of righteousness, and the fertilising showers of divine grace, to enable it to blossom as the rose, and to bring forth fruit unto perfection? Or as others will have it, which only awaits the fiat of the sinner's will, co-operating with the grace and spirit of God, already given him, or within his reach; to enable it to expand in the abundant fruits of righteousness and true holiness? Is this the regeneration for which we as Methodists are contending?

In reply to this question, without pretending to an accurate and decided definition of every sentiment entertained and propagated in the Methodist connexion upon this point of doctrine, we may probably say with truth; first, that although the term regeneration appears to imply a complete renovation of soul, the impartation of a new and heavenly nature, and, as St Paul expressly asserts, "a new creation;"* yet it does not necessarily follow, that every spark of divine grace was previously extin-

* 2 Corinthians, v. 17.

guished in the soul, or that our nature was completely and essentially incapacitated for loving and serving God, although debilitated and disabled by the effects of sin. For it is by the same physical, intellectual, and rational powers, which we possess in a state of unconversion, that we must love and serve God in our regenerated state*.

But, secondly, admitting that every spark of the grace of God was extinguished in the heart, and that (notwithstanding the physical and intellectual powers of the soul remain the same they ever were,) yet that all moral capacity, as well as inclination to love and serve God, was extinct, and the soul in the strongest and most literal sense, morally dead in trespasses and sins; still, even in this case, we dare not say the salvation of such a man is beyond the reach of the mercy, grace, and power of God to ac-

* It is an important fact, supported by the soundest principles of reason and religion, that human nature, either in its infantile or adult state, is not naturally or physically incapacitated for loving and serving God; but it is morally disqualified for that love and service. In the former state by natural imbecility, ignorance, and peccability: and in the latter, by the same imperfections under new modifications, combined with the actual presence and power of sin, imbibed, and operating as an active principle in the soul, the faculties of which are voluntarily subjected to its baneful influence. This principle receives a mortal wound in the act of regeneration; and it gradually declines as the renovated soul advances in the knowledge and love of God, being thereby transformed into the moral image of God. The Methodists generally believe in the final extinction of sin in this life, as essential to salvation. They also believe this to be for a considerable time not only gradual and progressive, but ultimately instantaneous

complish. He appears, on the contrary, to be still an eligible subject for the regenerating power of the grace of God, and of the quickening influence of his holy spirit, whereby he may be raised "from a death of sin, to a life of holiness and righteousness." "For if any man be in Christ, there is in him a new creation: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." But this new creation superadds nothing to the essential qualities of our original nature: it is grafted upon that nature, into which it infuses a new and divine principle of life, and which it thereby renovates, sanctifies, and redeems from the guilt, the power, and the nature of sin, and sows in our hearts the seeds of present holiness, as the pledge of future glory.

Hence we finally conclude, that regeneration is that glorious and efficacious work of the holy spirit of God in the heart of a sinner, whereby he is led, first, to a knowledge of his miserable state, both by nature and practice*, to discover that he is a fallen,

* We have already seen that the evils entailed upon the posterity of Adam are both natural or corporeal, and spiritual or moral. In the former are ranked, pain, toil, necessity, sickness, and death. In the latter we perceive, nescience, imbecility, exposure to temptation, and extreme peccability. But hereditary sin comes not into the catalogue of human misery without farther proof. The original rectitude of human nature was calculated for the enjoyment of felicity in the meridian of an earthly paradise. But it failed in its first effort to resist the assault of temptation. It appears to have been suited to a state of rest and tranquillity, but not calculated to support a successful war against the allurements of sense, and the seductions of vanity. This nature in its propagated state, is qualified for the enjoyment

and most miserable being, while destitute of the knowledge and love of God in his soul; and that the wages of that sin, in the power and practice of which he has long lived, is everlasting death. Secondly, whereby he is led to lament his alienation from the true source of felicity, to repent of those sins which have long separated his soul from God; and to repose a well-founded confidence in the mercy of God, through the merits of his Redeemer, for the forgiveness of all his sins, and the restoration of his sin-sick soul to the favour and image of his adorable creator. And, thirdly, whereby he is actually put in possession of that mercy and grace he stands in need of; that inward kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, which are the testimonials of his adoption into the family of heaven, and of his becoming an heir of eternal glory. Mean time, God

of a celestial paradise, which appears to be the soil and atmosphere properly calculated to nourish its tender branches, and preserve its incipient blossoms from the rude blasts of temptation, and the nipping frosts of sin. In this state, it is far less capable of sustaining hostility, with security to itself, than it was in the maturity of Adamic perfection. Hence the almost uniform seduction of infants into the ways of sin and death. We say almost uniform, because instances can be adduced of their entire preservation from the pollution of sin. But their own extreme debility, and the imperfections both natural and moral under which they labour, demonstrate that such preservation must be the result of supernatural aid and divine inspiration. John the Baptist, who united as it were the Jewish and Christian dispensations in his own person, furnishes a case in point. For he was filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. (Luke i. 15.)

sends forth the spirit of his Son into his heart, to bear witness to the truth of this glorious change, and to seal the heir of glory with the spirit of adoption, unto the day of his eternal redemption; that holy spirit testifying to his spirit that he is passed from death unto life, and become the child of God by faith in the Son of his love. And now the sinner becomes a saint: the child of wrath and heir of hell becomes the adopted son of God, and the heir of an eternal weight of glory: the former slave of sin becomes the willing servant of God; and, abounding in the fruits of holiness, both in his heart and in his life, he finds the end of his faith and patience, his resignation and zeal, his fidelity and love, shall be everlasting life in the mansions of celestial glory, prepared for the redeemed children of God from the foundation of the world*.

It is plain, from these characteristics of the "New Birth," that as man is the subject, so God is the author of this great and glorious work. Every portion of it is the operation of his holy spirit; it is carried on and accomplished not only under his divine influence, but by his direct agency and sacred energy. "It is God (saith St Paul,) who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."† Yet the man is not altogether passive in this important work; on the contrary, all the powers of his soul are pressed into its service, and he is called upon to be "a worker together with God" therein ‡. But inasmuch as the life from which it springs, and the

* Matt. xxv. 34. † Phil. ii. 13. ‡ 2 Cor. vi. 1.

power by which it is accomplished, flow from God alone, let the praise and the glory of our salvation be wholly ascribed to him who hath loved us, and who gave his only begotten Son, to the intent that "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life." To him, therefore, be ascribed the glory, and praise, and thanksgiving, for ever and ever!

* John, iii. 15 16.

CHAP. V.

OF FAITH AS THE MEDIUM OF REDEMPTION, AND INSTRUMENT OF SALVATION.—ITS NATURE, PROPERTIES, AND MODE OF OPERATION DISCUSSED.—OF THE WILL OF MAN.—HOW FAR THIS MAY BE SAID TO BE FREE.—ITS USE IN PROMOTING SALVATION INVESTIGATED.—OF SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS.—ITS NATURE INQUIRED INTO.—INCONSISTENT WITH THE RELIGION OF CHRIST.—DANGEROUS EFFECTS OF ITS INDULGENCE.—

SECTION I.—*Of Justifying Faith.*

ALTHOUGH there is not in the Methodist connexion a perfect unanimity of sentiment respecting the precise nature and mode of operation of what is termed "justifying faith;" yet we are generally agreed, that it is at least the grand instrument of salvation under the christian dispensation: seeing St Paul hath declared, 1st. That without faith it is impossible to please God;* and 2d. That being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ†. Justifying faith is a term much used among us, but in using this, we should be cau-

* Hebrews, xi. 6. † Romans, v. 1.

tious lest we inadvertently ascribe a power to this grace which it doth not possess. To speak correctly, we must not say that faith possesseth an efficacious or intrinsic power of justification. No ; it is merely the instrument or medium through which God himself imparts the blessing of justification to a penitent soul. And inasmuch as that faith itself appears by the testimony of scripture, to be both the *gift* and *operation* of God*, it may be justly questioned if we are perfectly accurate in making faith, as we generally do, to be the condition of a sinner's acceptance with God. The term condition, thus applied, seems to imply something which we are able to perform as a valuable and meritorious work, upon which we may found our recommendation, and repose our claim to the favour of God. But certainly faith, as the instrument of salvation, is not susceptible of this definition. It is simply the medium by which we have access to God, and through which he conveys the blessings connected with salvation to our souls. The scriptures assure us it is God†, (and consequently not faith) who justifies a penitent sinner. By faith we apprehend, embrace, and appropriate the privileges of the children of God to ourselves ‡.

* Eph. ii. 8.—Col. ii. 12. † Rom. iii. 30.—viii. 33.

‡ It is readily admitted, that "believing in the Lord Jesus Christ" is the only means appointed of God, whereby salvation can be obtained under the gospel dispensation. Believing is the act; faith is the principle from which that act flows, and by which it is performed. God inspires this principle in the soul. The sinner's heart embraces it, and with it lays hold on the

It has already been hinted, that Mr Wesley held at different periods of his life distinct and incompatible sentiments respecting the nature of justifying faith. It cannot be irrelevant to our present design, to cast our eye over those sentiments as they are described by himself in his usual concise and comprehensive style.

In the minutes of the first conference of the preachers in connexion with Mr Wesley*, we find the following definition of faith, and observations in its effects and fruits.

"*Question.* What is faith?—*Answer.* Faith in general is a divine supernatural *Elenchos* (demonstration) of things not seen, that is, of past, future, or spiritual things. It is a spiritual sight of God, and the things of God. First, a sinner is convinced by the Holy Ghost, "Christ loved me and gave himself for me." This is the faith by which he is justified or pardoned the moment he receives it. Immediately the same spirit bears witness, "Thou art pardoned, thou hast redemption in his blood." And this is saving faith, whereby the love of God is shed abroad in his heart."

"*Question.* Have all christians this faith? May not a man be justified and not know it?—*Answer.*

merits of his Redeemer. Thus faith brings him to God, but as God is its author, it is not so properly the condition, as the medium of redemption. By abandoning the former, and adopting the latter word, we remove the obnoxious idea of a bargain in the terms of our salvation, and embrace it as the free gift of God, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

* Held in London, 25th June 1744.

That all true christians have such a faith as implies an assurance of God's love, appears from Rom. viii. 15.—2 Cor. xiii. 5.—Eph. iv. 32.—Heb. viii. 10.—1 John iv. 10. v. 19. And that no man can be justified and not know it, appears further from the nature of the thing. For faith after repentance is ease after pain, rest after toil, light after darkness."

"*Question.* But may not a man go to heaven without it?—*Answer.* It does not appear from holy writ, that a man who hears the gospel can, (Mark xvi.16.) whatever a heathen may do. (Rom. ii. 14.)"

"*Question.* What are the immediate fruits of justifying faith?—*Answer.* Peace, joy, love, power over all outward sin, and power to keep down all inward sin."

"*Question.* Does any one believe, who has not the witness in himself, or any longer than he sees, loves, and obeys God?—*Answer.* We apprehend not, seeing God being the very essence of faith, love, and obedience, the inseparable properties of it."

At the second conference*, we find the following minutes.

"*Question.* Is an assurance of God's pardoning love, absolutely necessary to our being in his favour? Or may there possibly be some exempt cases?—*Answer.* We dare not positively say there are not."

"*Question.* Is such an assurance absolutely necessary to inward and outward holiness?—*Answer.* To inward we apprehend it is, to outward holiness we incline to think it is not."

* Bristol, August 1, 1745.

"*Question.* Is it indispensably necessary to final salvation? Suppose in a Papist*, or a Quaker? Or in general, among those who never heard it preached?—*Answer.* Love hopeth all things. We know not how far any of these may fall under the case of invincible ignorance."†

Question. But what can we say of one of our own society who dies without it, as I. W. at London?—*Answer.* It may possibly be an exempt case, (if the fact was really so,) but we determine nothing. We leave his soul in the hands of him that made it."

At the fourth conference (held in 1747,) the following minute on this point of doctrine stands recorded.

"*Question.* Is justifying faith a divine assurance that Christ loved me and gave himself for me? —*Answer.* We believe it is."

In the preceding extracts we have delineated the judgment of the preachers, assembled in three of the earliest conferences, respecting the nature and fruits of justifying faith; and it is evident, that they were fully of opinion that it is, and ever will be accompanied by a sense of the pardoning love of God

* Was it from any supposed similarity in the principles of these sects, that Mr Wesley thus places them in the same rank? It is certain, that in other parts of his works he accuses them both of holding "justification by works," and probably with truth.

† *Query.*—Does Mr W. here insinuate that "invincible ignorance" will furnish an admissible apology for the want of any essential qualification for the kingdom of God? In a land where the gospel of Christ is universally promulgated, that ignorance must be the result of wilful and obstinate unbelief; and is not this rather an aggravation of guilt, than a legitimate apology for it?

to the soul of the true believer; if that sense does not constitute the essence of that faith, which they appeared strongly inclined to think was actually the case.

At this period, Mr Wesley appears to have believed that "justifying faith," and what he elsewhere terms, "the proper christian faith," were perfectly synonymous. And accordingly in his early writings he describes them promiscuously as exactly similar in their origin, fruits, and operation. In his sermon on Salvation by Faith, we have the following description of it under the latter denomination: "Christian faith is then, not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us. It is a sure confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ *his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God;* and in consequence hereof, a closing with him, and cleaving to him, as our "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," or in one word our SALVATION."

About this time*, Mr Wesley wrote a tract entitled "Advice to the People called Methodists." In this he describes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as professed and enjoyed by them, to be the foundation of their love to God. This filial love (saith he,) you suppose to flow only from faith; which you describe

* October 10, 1745.

as a supernatural evidence, or conviction of things not seen; so that to him who has this principle,

> " The things unknown to feeble sense,
> Unseen by reason's glimmering ray,
> With strong commanding evidence,
> Their heavenly origin display:
> Faith lends its realising light,
> The clouds disperse, the shadows fly,
> Th' invisible appears in sight,
> And God is seen by mortal eye."

You suppose this faith to imply *an evidence that God is merciful to me a sinner;* that he is reconciled to me by the death of his Son, and now accepts me for his sake. You accordingly describe the faith of a real christian as " a sure trust and confidence (over and above his assent to the sacred writings,) which he hath in God that *his sins are forgiven,* and that he is, through the merits of Christ, reconciled to the favour of God." You believe farther, that this faith and love are wrought in us by the spirit of God.

Scarcely a month had elapsed, from the holding of the last-mentioned conference, before Mr Wesley's views respecting the nature of " justifying faith" began to alter, and he then thought he saw a distinction between that faith, and what he termed " the proper christian faith," which had previously escaped his attention. But it does not appear that the sentiments he now embraced, respecting this point of doctrine, were ever either officially communicated to, or sanctioned by any subsequent conference.

What, therefore, is now the legitimate doctrine of Methodism on this important subject, it is not easy to ascertain.

The account which the author of "The Chronological History of the People called Methodists,"* gives of this occurrence is as follows :—"In the next "month (viz. July 1747,) Mr Wesley wrote the fol- "lowing letter to his brother. I insert it because it "shews that he had thought more deeply respecting "the nature of justifying faith, after the last confer- "ence. He was afterwards more accurate on that "head, and spoke of it agreeably to the sentiments "of this letter.

"Dear Brother,—Yesterday I was thinking "of a *desideratum* among us, a *Genesis problematica* "on justifying faith. A skeleton of it (which you "may fill up, or any one that has leisure,) I have "roughly set down.

"Is justifying faith, a sense of pardon? *Nega-* "*tur*," (It is denied.)

"1. Every one is deeply concerned to understand "this question well: but preachers most of all; lest "they should either make them sad whom God hath "not made sad; or, encourage them to say, peace, "where there is no peace. Some years ago we "heard nothing of justifying faith, or a sense of par- "don, so that when we did hear of them, the theme "was quite new to us; and we might easily, espe-

* The Rev. William Myles, preacher of the gospel in the Methodist connexion in England.

" cially in the heat and hurry of controversy, lean
" too much either to the one hand or to the other.

" 2. By justifying faith I mean that faith which,
" whosoever hath it not, is under the wrath and the
" curse of God. By a sense of pardon I mean, a
" distinct, explicit assurance that my sins are for-
" given. I allow, 1st, That there is such an expli-
" cit assurance. 2d, That it is the common privi-
" lege of real christians. 3d, That it is the proper
" christian faith, which purifieth the heart and over-
" cometh the world. But I cannot allow that jus-
" tifying faith is such an assurance, or necessarily
" connected therewith.

" 3. Because if justifying faith necessarily implies
" such an explicit assurance of pardon, then every
" one who has it not, and every one so long as he
" has it not, is under the wrath and under the curse
" of God. But this is a supposition contrary to
" scripture as well as to experience. Contrary to
" Isaiah, i. 10. " Who is among you, that feareth
" the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant,
" that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let
" him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon
" his God." Contrary to Acts, x. 34. " Of a truth
" I perceive, that God is no respecter of persons,
" but in every nation, he that feareth him, and
" worketh righteousness is accepted with him."

" Contrary to experience, for I. R. &c. had peace
" with God, no fear, no doubt, before they had that
" sense of pardon. And so have I frequently had.
" Again, the assertion that justifying faith is a sense
" of pardon, is contrary to reason; it is flatly absurd:

" For how can a sense of our having received par-
" don, be the condition of our receiving it!"

On the sentiments contained in this letter, we may just remark: First. That what Mr Wesley supposed to be justifying faith, being described only by *the effect of its absence*, viz. " That faith which, whosoever hath it not, is under the wrath and curse of God;" we are at a loss to know what are the positive nature, qualities, and fruits of it; or what is its direct object, and how it is to be attained? Secondly. As to the scriptures quoted in support of these sentiments, the first was written under, and calculated for the dark dispensation of Judaism; and the second is principally, if not wholly applicable to heathens. Neither of these, therefore, can be the proper standard or criterion of a point of doctrine so essentially interwoven with the christian dispensation, and its superior privileges, as that of justification by faith in the blood and righteousness of a crucified Saviour. Thirdly. It appears very mysterious how any person can have solid " peace with God, all his fear and doubt removed, upon evangelical principles, without " a sense of the pardon of his sins!" Fourthly. The doctrine here laid down is altogether incompatible with that previously described, as sanctioned by two or three conferences preceding. Which of these, therefore, is the genuine doctrine of christianity, yet remains undetermined. Mr Wesley's opinion is not the standard.

Probably the truth is, that the true justifying faith of the gospel of Christ, that which God hath

sanctioned under the christian dispensation (and what have we to do with any other?) is described by St Paul, in Rom. x. 8.-11. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

The holy spirit of God having graciously given us this explicit definition of the nature, object, and mode of operation of that faith, which is by himself consecrated to the initiation of a penitent sinner, into the liberty and privileges of the sons of God, we are not justifiable in the indulgence of any speculations on this interesting subject, which are calculated to lead us from the simplicity and truth of this divine revelation. Here then our conjectures must end, and our future observations must be confined to the illustration and developement of the important doctrine here established.

And it is evident, in the first place, that the faith here described as the instrument or medium of a sinner's access to God, consists in a cordial assent to the important fact, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," and that having done so, he has given indubitable proof thereof, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That upon this point, taken in conjunction with an open confession of the faith which operates in the heart, is suspended the salvation of men under the chris-

tian dispensation*. This is the key which unlocks the mysteries of redemption, and the hand by which the great truths and privileges of christianity are embraced and appropriated to the soul; which puts it in possession of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and which prepares the mind for a close and intimate union with the father of the spirits of all flesh: a deep and uninterupted fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the agency of the co-eternal Spirit.

Secondly. We may also remark thereon, that although the divine object of a risen Saviour is proposed to the human understanding, yet the heart of man possesseth no inherent power, or natural inclination for embracing that Saviour in his mediatorial office. For besides the general truth already established, that all true faith is both the gift and operation of God, we have the following more particular declarations of scripture, demonstrative of the same important fact. Christ, addressing himself to the Jews, assures them, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw

* It is very probable that persons whose minds are jaundiced by prejudice, and who are fond of stigmatising scriptural doctrines by attaching opprobrious titles to them, may vilify the doctrine here laid down as Sandemanianism. The author has never read any of the works of Mr Sandeman; if any of the sentiments here avowed, happen to coincide with those of that writer, that coincidence is purely accidental: it may take place in the same way, as the agreement between Calvinists and Arminians on the merits of Christ's atonement, and its efficacy in procuring the justification of every true believer. Both parties cordially agree in this essential point.

him," and again, "No man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father," that is, the power to do so*. Here, coming to Christ, is perfectly synonymous with believing on him; it is by faith alone the soul draws nigh to Jesus, and embraces the blessings of his salvation, and the comforts of his grace. And again, saith St Paul, "I give you to understand that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."† That is, no man can say from a heart-felt conviction (which is the essence of true faith,) that Jesus Christ is the Lord of life and glory, but from the inspiration of the spirit of God. And hence it was, that when Peter made that noble confession of Christ, which drew forth his unqualified praise and approbation, our Lord immediately replied, "Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."‡

This view of the subject we find confirmed also by St John, who expressly asserts, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God,"§ the immediate fruit of which, is the love of God and man shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, given to every true believer; for the apostle instantly adds, "Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." Hence, we discover the amazing simplicity of that faith, which God hath ordained to be the medium of a sinner's reconciliation with himself. It is the cordial

* John, vi. 44. 65.
† 1 Corinthians, xii. 3.
‡ Matthew, xvi. 16.-17.
§ 1 John, v. 1.

belief of a fact, resting upon indubitable evidence, yet confirmed by a special revelation to the heart of man by the inspiration of the spirit of God. And the man who is the subject of this belief, receives the witness of the spirit of God in his own spirit, who bears testimony to the truths of revelation, and to the genuineness of that faith by which they are apprehended and embraced. Doubt and fear then vanish from the soul, which is immediately filled with the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, as beautifully expressed by the evangelical poet already cited,

> "Faith lends its realising light,
> The clouds disperse, the shadows fly,
> Th' invisible appears in sight,
> And God is seen by mortal eye!"

But before this can take place, the sinner must be in a measure turned from darkness to light*, the eyes of his understanding must be enlightened, and the powers of his mind awakened to a sense of his danger, while living "without God in the world," and to some desire and hope after the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. All this, it is evident, is absolutely necessary as the prelude to the exercise of that faith which introduces the soul into the glorious liberty of the children of God. And it is equally evident that these prerequisites are wrought in the soul by the special influence of the spirit of God, who is asserted to be the author of re-

* Acts, xxvi. 18.—Eph. i. 18.

pentance *, as well as of faith. Till this is done no man will trouble himself to seek for the power of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, with his heart unto righteousness; and hence we are justified in the conclusion that no man who is living under the dominion of sin, has a particle of true faith in either the person or offices of the Son of God; as he is a rebel against God in his practice, so he is an infidel in his principles. That such a man as Jesus Christ once lived in the world, he may not dispute, but take it for granted as a fact at least as well authenticated as the existence of Julius Cæsar; but he reposes no more confidence in the person or offices of the one for salvation, than he does in those of the other. Consequently he derives neither peace nor righteousness from his intellectual assent to the existence of Jesus Christ. He recognises him not as the Son of God, who bore his sins in his own body on the tree, nor does he rest any well-founded hope upon his mediation for eternal redemption.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews†, asserts, that Jesus is "the author and finisher of the faith" of his people. But if Jesus be the author of this excellent gift, "without which it is impossible to please God," it may be demanded, why it is that he who gave himself a ransom for all, does not put every man in possession of a living faith? To this the answer is plain: because they are not in that state which requires and sanctions the communication of this heavenly gift. They have resisted the

* Rom. ii. 4.—2 Tim. ii. 25. † Chapter, xii. 2.

previous operations of the holy spirit of God, which it was necessary should have their full effect upon the mind, to prepare it for the reception and exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They retain their wilful and obstinate rebellion against God, the enmity of their hearts and alienation of their lives, and reject all the overtures of mercy and grace, which the God of love hath made to their souls; and it would be a degradation of the precious gifts of God, to bestow these upon hardened impenitent sinners, who were insensible of their value, and ignorant of their use. This would be "casting pearls before swine,"* a thing which our Lord expressly prohibited in his apostles; he therefore will not do it himself. For though God is certainly the author of both repentance and faith, he will not force either of these upon mankind†. They must operate in conjunction with the rational and intellectual

* Matthew, vii. 6.

† Generally speaking, this is undoubtedly true; yet instances are on record even in the annals of Methodism, of persons who were suddenly, unexpectedly, and even against their own will and inclination, arrested by the power of converting grace, and brought thereby to the enjoyment of the favour and love of God. We may see a remarkable case of this kind related in the Methodist Magazine for Nov. 1812, p. 508. A persecuting wretch who was in the act of stabbing his wife for her attachment to religion: in that moment deep conviction seized his soul, arrested his arm, and terminated in his conversion to God! In the account of the remarkable revival in religion which took place in America a few years ago, we meet with numerous instances of persons who went to those meetings either from motives of idle curiosity, or with intent to oppose and ridicule the

powers of the soul, and with the concurrence of the human will. But vain would be the efforts of these without the influence of the grace and spirit of God; and from hence we feel ourselves justified in drawing these conclusions.

1st. That it is at least morally impossible, for a hardened impenitent sinner while in that state, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to the salvation of his soul.

And 2d. That it is equally impossible for a penitent to believe to his justification, till God reveals his son in him*, as the hope of eternal glory. Yet we are well assured that God will infallibly work "the work of faith with power," in the heart of every genuine penitent, who, being disposed and prepared for it†, continues to seek until he finds the pearl of great price in the redemption of his precious and immortal soul.

glorious work; and some with avowed determination to resist the converting influence of grace if attacked with it: yet multitudes of these returned happy in the enjoyment of the favour and love of God! These appear to have been eminent witnesses of the truth of that scripture which saith; "I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest to them that asked not after me." Isaiah, lxv. 1. Romans, x. 20.

* Galatians, i. 16.

† It is the opinion of many judicious commentators, that the Greek word τεταγμενοι, which occurs Acts, xiii. 48, and is there rendered "*ordained*," should be properly translated *predisposed*; that is, prepared by repentance for the operation of faith, as a prelude to the final enjoyment of eternal life. Parkhurst explains the term by *disposed*, or *adapted*: Dr Whitby and Dr Hammond both understand it in the same way.

When we speak of the natural inability of men, to believe the great truths of the gospel, relative to the person and offices of our blessed Lord, we do not thereby insinuate that the powers of the human mind have no concurrent action with the spirit of God in the article of faith. But we assert that the principle which produces the act of faith, comes directly from God; nor can the act be performed until the principle be imparted. Over and above the scriptural testimonies already adduced in support of this doctrine, we find it to be the confirmed sentiment of Mr Wesley. Among a multitude of other instances, take the following from one of his hymns,

"Remove this hardness from my heart,
This unbelief remove;
To me the rest of faith impart,
The sabbath of thy love."

This language, put into the mouth of a sincere penitent, demonstrates his conviction of the important truth, that God alone can remove the veil of unbelief, and impart the gift of faith to a penitent soul. This, therefore, we ought constantly to inculcate as a fundamental and most important principle of christianity.

If the preceding view of the nature, origin, and operation of faith, be scriptural and rational, it overthrows the opinions of those who describe all faith as the mere exercise of a natural power inherent in every human soul, whereby the truths proposed to the understanding are embraced and as-

sented to, upon the strength of the evidence which accompanies those truths, and which, in a logical way, carries irresistible conviction to the judgment. The advocates for this doctrine (and they are numerous in the Methodist connexion,) contend that the faith which is ordained of God to be the instrument of our salvation, is essentially the same with that reliance which we repose upon the testimony of a man, in whose integrity we can place implicit confidence; the distinction between these consisting only in the diversity of the objects which they embrace. And accommodating their language to their principles, they divide faith into human and divine: human faith is, according to them, the assent which we give to human testimony; and divine faith the assent which we give to divine testimony. And they insinuate, that the one is as much the spontaneous act of the natural powers of the human mind as the other.

The evidence upon which this "divine faith" is required and supposed to rest, is that which is contained in the oracles of inspiration. But little or nothing is either said or admitted respecting the particular influence of the spirit of God, in applying the truths of scripture to the conscience, or inspiring a conviction of their reality and importance. Whereas it must be evident to every attentive observer, that the mere letter of scripture is totally inade-

* Witness hundreds of ungodly ministers, and parish clerks. Respecting multitudes of these it may be truly said, that Charity herself must fall out with truth, before she can ascribe to them one particle of saving faith. These men demonstrate the

quate to the production of faith, without the particular inspiration of the spirit of God. This is obvious from the melancholy instances which surround us, of persons whose profession obliges them to a constant perusal of the holy scriptures, but who nevertheless exhibit no marks of faith in the object of those scriptures*. They want the living principle, which God alone can inspire, and without which the scriptures themselves are but a dead letter, and all our efforts at the production of either faith or holiness are nugatory and contemptible.

Faith, however, must not be confounded with its fruits and effects. These are,—peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, power over sin, inward as well as outward holiness; and a blooming hope of a glorious immortality. In the language of St Paul, they are "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Many observing that these fruits are the inseparable companions of true faith, have confounded them with that principle which operates to their production in the soul of the true believer. And these persons being probably informed by their teachers, that faith is to be the condition of their acceptance with God, have set themselves with all their power to create both faith and its concomitant holiness in their own souls, as the source of their recommendation to the favour of God.

the truth of St Paul's declaration, who assures us that the natural man is incapable of comprehending the deep truths of christianity, until supernaturally enlightened for that purpose by the spirit of God.—1 Cor. ii. 14.

They even seem to think, that they must both purify their hearts, and give themselves a sense of their acceptance with God, which sense they suppose to be the essence of that faith, which they are taught is necessary to bring with them as the condition of obtaining a favourable reception from God! Whereas, the faith which introduces a man into the blessed privileges of the children of God, finds him a stranger to God, an alien from the paths of holiness, and previously destitute of a single qualification to recommend him to the favour of his Maker. He is poor, blind, miserable, naked, and helpless, diseased with sin, and at the point of spiritual death.

Mr Wesley's observations on this point being equally sound and judicious, commend themselves to our attention. Having previously spoken of the nature of justifying faith, he says, "This implies, that "a man first renounces himself; that in order to be "found in Christ, to be accepted through him, he to-"tally rejects all confidence in the flesh; that having "nothing to pay, having no trust in his own works or "righteousness of any kind, he comes to God as "a lost, miserable, self-destroyed, self-condemned, "undone, helpless sinner; as one whose mouth is "utterly stopped, and who is altogether guilty be-"fore God. Such a sense of sin (commonly call-"ed despair, by those that speak evil of the things "they know not,) together with a full conviction, "such as no words can express, that of Christ only "cometh our salvation, and an earnest desire of "that salvation, must precede a living faith; a trust "in him who "*for us paid our ransom by his death,*

and for us fulfilled the law in his life." (See Wesley's Sermon on the Marks of the New Birth, Section 3.) Here is no allusion either to "clean hands or a pure heart;" no, nor to faith previously created in the soul of the sinner as the conditions of his acceptance with God! The distress of these poor creatures, on finding themselves utterly unable to produce either faith or its fruits in themselves, as the condition of their acceptance, when told they are indispensable prerequisites, may be easier conceived than described. Doubtless, it has driven thousands to despair, and not a few to distraction, or perhaps to final perdition!

Happily, however, some of those very advocates for faith, and perhaps, works also, as the condition of a sinner's acceptance with God, when seeing the distress of these helpless souls, have been induced, from the urgency of the case, to abandon their grounds of "terms and conditions,"* and by a happy inconsistency with themselves, have exhorted the perishing sinner to cast himself just as he is, with all his sins upon his head, with "his evil heart

* Let it not be imagined that the writer of these lines in objecting to "terms and conditions," intends to inculcate an idea that sinners can be saved under the gospel dispensation, without abandoning their sins, and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for redemption. Neither candour nor truth will support such an accusation upon any of the principles here laid down. The author well knows that both faith and holiness are essential to salvation; but his Bible teaches him to consider these as the fruits of redeeming grace, and not as the conditions to be by a sinner performed, prior to his being entitled to partake of that grace. He reads of no such bargain entered into between God

of unbelief," still "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" guilty, miserable, helpless, and without further attempts to make himself better, at the feet of a crucified Saviour, for complete, unqualified, and unconditional redemption, assuring him that Jesus would in no wise cast him out: and lo! in that moment, the desponding wretch found peace to his soul, and faith, hope, and love instantly sprang up in his renovated heart! Not as the condition of his acceptance, but as the fruit of his Redeemer's grace.

But it will probably be here objected, that our blessed Lord has expressly laid down faith, or believing, as the indispensable condition of a sinner's salvation, in those memorable words, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."* The word condition, it is plain, does not occur in this passage; nor does the sense of the words neces-

and the sinner under the New Testament covenant, and therefore he cannot give it the sanction of his approbation. The abrogation of the Old Testament covenant of works, as the medium of reconciliation with God, and the establishment of the New Testament covenant of redemption, mercy, and grace; instead thereof, are distinctly and explicitly laid down by St Paul, first in 2 Cor. iii. 6.-18. and secondly, in Heb. viii. 6.-13. And every preacher of the gospel ought to know, that every step he takes towards the re-establishment of works as the condition of a sinner's acceptance with God, operates to the destruction of those evangelical principles, which are the legitimate springs of salvation, under the covenant of grace.

* Mark, xvi. 15. 16.

sarily imply either bargain or condition. Our Lord is simply describing the medium through which the salvation he had just purchased, for the lost sons of Adam, should be conveyed to their souls, namely, by believing the glad tidings of that salvation; and our reason bears witness, that in the very nature of things it cannot come to an intelligent being by any other means. But as long as that very act of believing is wrought in the soul by the agency of the spirit of Christ himself, it cannot, with any kind of propriety, be exhibited as the condition upon the performance of which, our acceptance with God is suspended. The term it unscriptural, and as its very sound is derogatory to the freedom of the grace of God, and to the "gift of eternal life," is it not much better to abandon an obnoxious and degrading word, than appear to inculcate the injurious principle that our faith can purchase the salvation of our souls? Let us never forget that *our faith is as much the free gift of God, as any other branch of his saving grace.* And this evangelical and truly scriptural maxim, will effectually guard us from considering it as the meritorious condition of our acceptance with God.

But there is found in the heart of every true child of God, under the christian dispensation, a much higher degree of faith than that which operates to the first discovery of the truth as it is in Jesus, and which is the instrument of his primary initiation into the privileges of the gospel. This consists in a constant and unclouded evidence of our full acceptance with God, and of the emanation of the di-

vine love and favour to our souls. It is the medium by which we enjoy a constant and uninterrupted intercourse with our reconciled God and Father; the cement and bond of our intimate union with Christ; of our fellowship with both the Father and the Son, by the blessed agency of the holy Spirit. By this are revealed to us the glories of the divine nature; by this we are assured of our personal interest, not only in the meritorious intercession of our great Redeemer, but in all the glorious perfections of the Godhead; and by this we are transformed into the divine image. We feel his love to be the ruling principle of our minds, and under its precious influence our hearts are purified from the love, and our lives from the practice of sin; and we find ourselves competent, by the grace of God, to wage a successful war against the world, the flesh, and the devil, being always "more than conquerors" over these our mortal enemies, through him that hath loved us, and given himself for us. Walking in the light of his reconciled countenance, we rejoice "in the full assurance of hope," knowing that our almighty Saviour is able "to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy."*

The direct objects of this faith are the attributes and perfections of the divine nature, as existing in the sacred persons of the triune God †, uniting and

* Jude, 24.

† Here it may not be impertinent to ask, Do the Methodists embrace and vindicate the doctrines contained in the Athanasian Creed? Do their principles enjoin a firm belief that a conviction

co-operating in our redemption; the restoration of our souls to the image of that God, and an uninterrupted communion with him on earth, preparatory to the final fruition of our felicity in the realms of celestial glory. This divine principle draws the curtain of futurity, and reveals to the ravished soul the transcendent joys of "an eternal weight of glory." It discovers the riches of that inheritance, which is "incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not

and confession of the truth of the Trinitarian sentiments contained in that compendium of christian faith, are really essential to salvation? The author puts this question on account of the uncertainty which rests upon it throughout the writings of Methodism. And he knows that a diversity of sentiment on this point exists in the connexion. "Do we suppose either an Arian or a Socinian to be eligible to salvation? Those among us who doubt this, are accused of want of charity, and have been confronted with Mr Wesley's sentiments in a recent periodical publication, whose principles are not very congenial with those of christianity. The instance alluded to occurs in the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* for March, 1813, which among its anecdotes contains the following:

"An Example to Modern Methodists.—The Rev. John Wesley himself has asserted in his writings, not only that an Anti-trinitarian may manifest a desire of escaping future misery, but that he may be a truly good man. In one of the numbers of the Arminian Magazine, published a few years before his death, he inserted an extract of the memoir of the life of that eminent Unitarian, Thomas Firmin. In introducing this extract he observed, that "he had been formerly inclined to think, that a person who was unsound with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, could not be a converted or good man. But that now he thought differently, since the subject of the memoir was undoubtedly a pious man, though erroneous in the doctrine of the Trinity, and *that there was no arguing against facts.*"

away ;" and by a blessed anticipation of our future felicity, enables us to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Putting us in present possession of the inward kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, as the sure pledge of our everlasting happiness, the earnest our eternal inheritance with all the redeemed children of our God and Father. In the sublime language of our admirable poet, it is the source of that

> " — Glorious hope of perfect love,
> Which lifts me up to things above,
> And bears on eagle's wings;
> It gives my ravished soul a taste,
> And makes me for some moments feast
> With Jesus' priests and kings."

There can be no doubt but this invaluable gift of faith in all its glorious perfection, and extensive influence, is the common privilege of every child of God under the christian dispensation; and the great salvation of which it is the instrument, is proposed to and intended for every soul of man, for " whosoever will may come and take of the water of life freely." Both that salvation, and the faith by which it is embraced, are equally the gift and operation of the spirit of God. But, by the injudicious representation of faith in any of its degrees or branches, as the condition of our salvation, it becomes as it were a scare-crow to one party, and the idol of another. To those who have it not, and who feel the impossibility of creating it in their own souls, it presents an insuperable barrier to their

hopes, and after many fruitless attempts to produce it, they sometimes take offence at the terms of salvation, and abandon the pursuit of redemption in hopeless despair. While others, who possess some portion of faith, are induced to regard it as the passport to heaven, and to ascribe to its efficacy, much of that praise which is due only to the merits of a crucified Saviour. They repose in their own faith, some of that confidence which can only rest with security on the bosom of their adorable Redeemer, and look upon it at least in a secondary point of view, as the author of their salvation.

Whereas, in truth, our faith works no change whatever in the divine mind towards us. Had not God loved me, and given his son for me, before I had an idea of believing in him for salvation, it is plain my faith could have no ground whereon to rest. Faith reveals the pre-existing love of God to my soul, but it cannot produce that love in God. It is true, it puts me in possession of the benefits arising from that love, and is the means by which the same divine principle is conveyed to my own soul: "we love him (saith St. John,) because (our faith assures us) he first loved us." And we know, its exercise is consonant to the divine pleasure, and productive of the divine approbation, because it both honours the truth of God's declarations, and contributes to the advancement of his glory, in the display and application of the riches of his mercy and grace, and in the consequent felicity of his creatures.

But by representing faith as the condition of our acceptance with God, we not only suspend the

operation of the grace of God towards our souls upon that faith, but we make it the procuring cause of the existence of that grace, so far as it respects our own persons. Now this is directly reversing the true order of things, and the consequences of doing this are equally pernicious and absurd. For we cannot suppose for a moment that our faith can either create love in the divine mind, or change the disposition of God towards his creatures. The glorious attributes of the Deity are not to be altered by the belief or unbelief of any creature*. Permanent and invariable, all the perfections of the Godhead remain "the same yesterday, to day, and for ever." All that faith can do for us, is to place us within the sphere of the operation of the divine love; and then, but not before we personally reap the benefits flowing from the riches of his grace.

But the language of faith as the condition of our obtaining grace, when addressed to the condemned sinner, is, "God doth not yet love you, nor will he ever do so, but upon one condition, namely, that you believe that he does love you!" Nay, saith the sinner, "I cannot believe that, for I have no evidence of it, but quite the reverse, for I feel his wrath abiding upon me, and I know that I am justly obnoxious to his righteous judgment, and eternal vengeance; yea, he hath positively promised, if not sworn my destruction†. How, therefore, can I believe

* 2 Timothy, ii. 13.—James, i. 17.

† Ezekiel, xviii. 4. 13.—Revelations xxi. 8.

that he loves me? I cannot do it, no, not even if my salvation depends upon it; for it is in direct opposition to the conviction of my heart." But faith, as a condition, rejoins, "you must believe it, or perish, for God will never love you, till you first believe it. His love is suspended on this one indispensable condition." Then, saith the sinner, I must finally perish; for I cannot undertake to change the dispositions of the divine mind towards me; and particularly by the forced belief of a fact which you yourself tell me does not exist! I reject such terms of salvation, as degrading to my own understanding, and utterly unworthy the character of that God, against whose glorious perfections, I have so long and so wickedly rebelled."

Abandoning, therefore, faith as the condition of a sinner's acceptance with God, as an untenable position, we turn to the true evangelical principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And what say they? Why, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son to die for that world, to the intent, that whosoever believeth on him, shall not perish but have everlasting life."* "O (saith the penitent sinner,) I believe that most cordially." Dost thou indeed! Then, St Paul informs thee (Rom. x. 8. 9. 10.) thou hast performed all that is requisite on thy part, towards the forgiveness of thy sins, and to

* John, iii. 16.—Here it is most evident that God hath not founded his love upon our faith; but has previously laid down his love manifested in the gift of his only begotten Son, as the permanent foundation upon which our faith can repose with unbounded security.

entitle thee to the salvation of thy soul! But, "I want the evidence of my acceptance; a sense of the pardoning love of God shed abroad in my heart; I want my condemnation taken away, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, imparted to my soul."

And dost thou not know that the blessed spirit of God must impart this precious blessing to thy heart? Go then, and plead with him upon the merits of that Saviour, in whom thou dost believe; wrestle in mighty prayer, and urge thy suit, with all the faith thou hast, in the blood and righteousness of thy great atoning sacrifice; and God will not, cannot withstand thy claim. He will infallibly wash thee in "the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin," and give thee the witness of his own spirit, that thou art accepted in the son of his love. Yea, he will "seal thee with the spirit of adoption to the day of eternal redemption." Then thou shalt be enabled stedfastly to believe, embrace, and realise, by thy own experience, all those "exceeding great and precious promises" left on record by the God of truth, for thy present comfort and eternal felicity. Like Moses thou shalt "endure as seeing him who is invisible," thy faith shall lead thee on to the perfection of holiness in filial fear, and ardent love to God and man; while thy heart is purified by the inspiration of that holy spirit, who is both the author of faith and the finisher of salvation to every living member of the mystical body of Christ upon earth. And finally, that faith which first introduced thy soul into the glorious liberty of the

sons of God, matured into an unshaken confidence in his love, and having enabled thee to overcome the pollutions of the world, the enticements of the flesh, and the temptations of Satan, shall usher thee to the gates of Paradise,

> "Where faith is sweetly lost in sight,
> And hope in full supreme delight,
> And everlasting love!"

Section II.—*Of the Will of Man.*

The will of man is that noble faculty of the human soul, which determines his conduct as a rational being, and, by the freedom of its volitions, renders him responsible to his Maker for the morality or immorality of his life, and a fit subject of either reward or punishment. But it is generally supposed that, although in the original constitution of the human frame, the will was perfectly free to the choice of good or evil, yet, that in the present state of depravity which pervades our souls, the will of man, in a state of nature, is free only to evil*, having neither bias nor inclination to that which is good. Yet it is evident that this incapacity is merely of a moral nature, and consequently does not affect the essence of the faculty; which is yet susceptible of rectification, and capable, under the influence of grace, of a

* This is the doctrine uniformly inculcated by Mr Wesley, wherever he treats of this subject.

voluntary and uniform dedication to the glory of God, and the practice of holiness.

Innumerable and endless have been the disputes which have arisen in the church of God out of the fertile subject now under consideration; and numberless volumes have been written in vindication of the different sentiments espoused by the disputants on each side of the question: the one contending for the natural and moral freedom, and the other for the restraint of this noble and distinguished faculty in the mind of man. It would be easy for us to bury ourselves in the rubbish which the scholastic divinity has heaped upon this endless controversy; but were we to plunge deeply into the mazes of that labyrinth, it is hard to say, whether all the philosophy and divinity we possess, would suffice to extricate us out of it. Leaving, therefore, the obscurities of philosophical systems, and the difficulties of scholastic arguments behind, we will proceed to examine by the light we derive from revelation, and the aid of our unprejudiced reason, into the nature and properties of the will of man; with the influence it has upon our dispositions and actions, as intelligent beings and moral agents, living and acting under the dispensation of the gospel of peace.

We have already seen that the will of man is the determining power of the mind, by which the actions are usually governed; and if we adhere to the principles of Arminianism, we contend for the free exercise of that power in every rational being. Yet it is evident, from a very slight observation of the process which takes place in our own minds, that

this freedom must be admitted with considerable caution, as it is necessarily limited in a thousand instances by the circumstances in which we are placed, and by the motives which govern our choice. Properly speaking, there is perhaps but one being in the universe, whose will may be said to be perfectly and absolutely free, and that is God. In the possession of absolute power, and foreseeing from eternity every possible contingency, it is impossible that any circumstances can derange the determinations of the divine mind, or alter the counsels of the most high; and as these are in perfect unison with the glorious attributes which are essential to his Deity, no new motives can ever arise, to produce a change in the immutable will of God.

But though the will of Go is properly and perfectly free, yet it is not arbitrary in its operation, but uniformly acts in conjunction with those attributes, which, while they seek to display the glory of their own perfections, unite to promote the felicity of all rational and intelligent beings. Nor is it any degradation of the essential glory of God to say, that he is not free to do evil; for this is one of the greatest perfections of the divine nature. Indeed, were we to consider the attribute of power alone, we must admit, that could the divine mind be capable of willing an evil action, he could also perform it, and none could controul or reprehend it. But the absolute rectitude of the divine nature precludes the possibility of God's either willing or doing that which is evil*.

* It is a question which has occupied a good deal of the at-

But the will of man is by no means universally free. In wicked men it is the slave of the passions and the servant of sin. In good men, it partakes of that blessed restraint, which inhibits the indulgence of evil, although there may be a natural propensity to that indulgence*. Every rational mind acts under the influence of principle and motive. These combined with, or arising out of the circumstances in which we are placed, apparently contingent, but certainly directed by a superintendent providence, govern our wills in every possible case. For instance, in common life self-interest is the motive which governs the conduct of most men, and the love of the world is the ruling principle which directs them to suppose that interest inseparably united to the possession of terrestrial wealth, power, and honour. The passions of the man are absorbed in the pursuit of these objects, and the circumstances in

tention of metaphysical divines,—"Is a thing right because God wills it; or does he will it because it is right?" Both the branches of this question should be answered in the affirmative; for the will of God can never be separated, no, not even in idea, from the most perfect and absolute rectitude, or from the emanations of his goodness and love.

* This is eminently illustrated in the case of Joseph, who, being tempted to sin by his lewd mistress, unquestionably felt a natural inclination coinciding with the temptation: but the superior principle of grace checked the impure volition, and prevented the actual commission of the proposed crime. "Shall I do this (saith the pious youth,) and sin against God?" No! he was "born of God," and his holy seed abiding in him, he could not commit that sin. The pious restraint which lay upon his mind rendered it morally impossible.—1 John, iii. 9.

which he is involved, combine to urge and encourage this pursuit. Now the will of this man, chained to the wheels of his passions, is uniformly pressed into a co-operation with the principle which governs the mind, and thus having the coincidence of the will, the actions are supposed to be free and voluntary; but this does not imply that the man possesseth any natural power to change his motives, or alter the determination of his will.

To enable him to do this, it is plain a more powerful and counteracting principle must be infused into his mind; a principle, which shall at once engage his attention, convince his judgment, and captivate his affections. Then, but not before, will be secured the co-operation of the will; for it is the understanding, the judgment, and the affections, which constitute the leading powers of the soul, and which invariably produce those acts of volition, which, upon a cursory view, appear to be the spontaneous effects of the single faculty denominated the will. It is true, we may conceive a state of mind wherein the will of man acts spontaneously with a domineering and irresistible impulse, apparently without motive, and destitute of a governing principle; but this state of mind is characteristic of folly and madness, and will not be claimed by the most zealous advocates for free will, as the legitimate and desirable state of a rational mind*.

* The freedom of the will, which is usually contended for by those who maintain that principle, appears to consist chiefly in the liberty of choice, between certain circumstances, or possible

Viewing mankind in their original or acquired state of alienation from God, it must be evident to every candid and enlightened mind, that there exists no inherent moral power in the solitary faculty, distinguished by the title of the will, to change the dispositions of the soul, to alter the course of the affections, and to press the united powers of soul and body into the love of holiness, and the practice of piety. But this moral debility affects not the essence of the faculty; it is still the determining power of the soul, though acting under the influence of erroneous principles; it assents to the pursuit of sensual gratifications, under the false idea that they are productive of that happiness which is the desirable object of every rational mind.

It will, however, be readily admitted by all the

events which are proposed to our minds. But in all cases of that kind, no rational man ever allows his will the arbitrary decision of the point. He reasons, he deliberates, he consults, and weighs the opposed circumstances in all their bearings, and his judgment or passion pronounces that decision, which instantly obtains the sanction of the will. If we may be permitted to compare the human mind to a well regulated political government, the understanding and judgment represent the deliberative and legislative branches; the will, the executive power; and the passions are the military. The peace and good order of society are uniformly disturbed, when the last assumes the reins of government; and the effusions of capricious tyranny may always be expected, when the executive presumes to act independent of the legislative body. So also, the absolute freedom of the will, so zealously contended for by some, whose untutored judgments are tinged with bigotry, would demonstrate its possessor to be either an idiot or a madman.

contending parties, either in the religious or philosophical world, that the consent of the will is indispensably necessary to the successful pursuit of any given object, and more particularly so in the pursuit and attainment of religion; but we shall find ourselves eggregiously mistaken, if we imagine that this faculty takes the lead, as the governing and directing power in the abandonment of sin, or the pursuit of that holiness, which is essential to salvation. The understanding, the judgment, and the passions, are all engaged in the reception of those primary impressions which, in the conversion of the soul, finally prevail over the love of sin, and inordinate attachment to the perishable objects of time and sense, before the concurrence of the will is obtained, and engaged in a cordial co-operation with those noble powers of the soul. And even after the consent of the will is fully obtained, and it begins to act in conjunction with both the understanding and judgment, still it is found inadequate to the conversion of the soul; for there is not in human nature, nor even in the first dawnings of the enlightening and convicting grace of God, a principle capable of subduing the inordinate concupiscence which reigns in the unregenerate heart of man*. The infusion of that regenerating principle which conquers the obstinacy of rebellious nature, and finally liberates the captive powers of the soul from the degrading slavery of sin, and the galling yoke of Satan, must

* The scriptural proof of this will be found in Romans, vii. 14.-24.

flow from the fountain of salvation opened in the bosom of Jesus, and must be imparted by that spirit whose peculiar office it is to renew the soul in the image of God.

In gaining the concurrence of the will of man, and in securing its coincidence with the designs and operations of the holy spirit of God, we discover the happiest combination of the wisdom, power, and love of God, uniting their gracious influence in obtaining that coincidence upon legitimate and unexceptionable principles, which both revelation and reason tell us is essential to our present felicity and eternal salvation. It is a common saying among us, that "God will not force any man to embrace the gospel terms of salvation." Probably the word force is inapplicable to the will of man; we may force a man to do an action in direct opposition to his own will, but we cannot compel him to will that action*. The consent of the will can be obtained only upon rational principles, operating on the leading powers of the soul above described. To these God

* The actions of a man, either mental or corporeal, are susceptible of coercion, and may be produced in opposition to the will, by the influence of exterior circumstances and events: but a pure and simple volition, an act of the will, is the result of a self-determining choice, and cannot be the subject of force, or the object of coercive influence: but that choice in every wise man is governed by the ruling principle of the soul. There is a natural power indeed of resisting this, but not a moral power. For instance; I possess a natural power to counteract the first law of nature, self-preservation, but the moral power of that first principle restrains me, and I cannot bring my will to con-

has the most direct means of access, and upon these we find he exercises that effectual influence which, though gentle in its commencement and gradual in its progress, terminates, in all cases of genuine conversion, in the voluntary surrender of the powers of body and soul to the glory of God, and the ultimate salvation of its faithful subject.

Upon the principles laid down in the gospel of our salvation, there can be no question as to the right which God possesseth over his rational, intelligent, and redeemed offspring, to exercise that powerful and finally prevailing influence, which arouses the fears, awakens the conscience, convinces the judgment, and converts the soul, although much of this work is carried on in direct opposition to the natural will of the man. And had those persons among us, who so strenuously contend for the free and uncontrouled exercise of their own will, disputing the right even of their Maker to interfere with its sacred dictates; had these been left to its free and unrestrained influence, there can be no doubt but they would have been to this day wallowing in the filth of sin, sunk in the gall of bitterness, and enslaved in the bondage of iniquity. Like headstrong and petulant children, they would have chosen those things, and have walked in those paths which would have terminated in their temporal misery, and ever-

sent to my own destruction. A criminal going to execution, is compelled to act in direct opposition to his own will: but the grace of God can infuse a principle which shall make him most perfectly willing to die. The consent of the will in that case, is not forced, but lawfully gained.

lasting destruction. Their free will, though perhaps the idol of their heart, would have infallibly borne them on its irresistible current down to the chambers of eternal death.

But God, in the richness of his mercy, checked the wild progress of this licentious faculty, and restrained its eccentric aberrations by his divine and powerful influence upon those nobler faculties of the mind, to which, in his wisdom as the God of nature, he hath intrusted the reins of government in the human mind. Surely it doth not become the subjects of this grace to rebel against the means which the wisdom and goodness of God adopted to subdue their stubborn wills, and bring the powers of their minds under the light and easy yoke of the gospel of peace. It is highly indecorous in these to contend against that plan of salvation, by which they themselves have been happily brought from the bondage of sin and corruption, "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

If the genial influence of the spirit of God, which effects the conversion of any individual, can, with propriety, be termed *coercive*, it is a coercion for which we never can be sufficiently thankful, and which demands our most ardent tribute of praise and adoration. It is similar in effect to that by which a tender father arouses his sleeping child, when the house is in flames about it; when half awakened, and yet insensible of the danger which invades it, the helpless infant frets and rebels against the unseasonable intrusion. Allow it the uncontrouled exercise of its free will, and its destruction instantly

ensues. But the parent doth not so abandon his offspring; he awakens and preserves it; and when that child arrives at years of discretion, it will bear a thankful remembrance of its happy deliverance.

So are the first operations of grace; opposing the natural will, they often compel the sinner, against every previous inclination of his soul, to escape for his life, as Lot from the city of destruction, and to fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him. Happy compulsion! for which he shall bless the God of his salvation, through the endless ages of a glorious eternity! Others are sweetly drawn by the silken cords of love, to embrace the precious salvation purchased for them by their great Redeemer. Enticed from the pernicious paths of vice, by the alluring influences of the spirit of holiness, they are caught in the gospel net, almost before they are aware of the grace which kindly circumvents their souls, and captivates their affections. Robbed perhaps by some kindly severe stroke of an interposing providence, of their territorial idols, the vacancy thereby left in their hearts is insensibly filled up with the incomparable riches of mercy and grace; and embracing the proffered love of God in Christ Jesus, they are powerfully attracted from earth to heaven, and soon become living witnesses of his power to save to the uttermost, all that believe in him with the heart unto righteousness.

It is evident that, in either of these cases, the conversion of the soul is to be ascribed wholly to the influence of the grace and spirit of God, who consequently is its sole author and finisher. It is true the

concurrence of the human will is gained under that influence; and so it must necessarily be, for God will not finally save any man against his will: but the will is not forced, it is gained over to a coincidence with the gracious designs of God, by those legitimate means which God hath sanctioned and ordained to this very purpose. And it is upon this very principle that we look for the conversion and final salvation of every individual for whom we offer up our petitions to the throne of grace.

In all those petitions we admit, and by admitting we sanction the principle, that God possesseth a power, which without violating the freedom of the human will, he can exercise in effecting the conversion of any individual of the human race. And if in our discourses from the pulpit, or in our more private conversation, we indulge Arminian prejudices to the destruction of this evangelical principle, this unhappy inconsistency furnishes a melancholy instance of the instability and uncertainty of our religious principles, but cannot affect the truth of God on this point; which is established upon his own authority beyond the power of controversy, and corroborated by ten thousand instances of the conversion of sinners, in answer to the prayers of others*.

* Mr Wesley always acknowledged and zealously maintained this principle, though many of our preachers in the present day strenuously deny it. In his Commentary on 1 Tim. ii. 3. St Paul having enjoined, in the preceding verse, that "prayers and supplications should be offered up for all men," and affirmed that "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, who willeth the salvation of all men," that venerable divine observes,

It has been received as a maxim among us, that "if a christian will do the will of God, he must, in every instance wherein he does that will, renounce his own." This we find recorded first in Mr Wesley's commentary on Matthew, xvi. 24. "If any man (saith our blessed Redeemer,) be willing to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Mr Wesley's note upon this passage is: "If any man be willing to come after me; —None is forced, but if any will be a christian, it it must be on these terms:—Let him deny himself and take up his cross (a rule that can never be too much observed;) let him in all things deny his own will, however pleasing, and do the will of God however painful." Perhaps it may be owing to the want of capacity in the present writer*, that he cannot discern the beauty, and consistency of this pro-

"Do you ask, why are not more converted? Because we do not pray enough."—And in some part of his writings (not immediately in the recollection of the author,) he establishes this principle as a bulwark against predestination: "I can easily account (saith he,) for the conversion of both Colonel Gardiner, and the Rev. Mr Newton, without having recourse to predestination to explain it. They both had pious mothers, or aunts, in answer to whose prayers doubtless God converted both these men." An eminent instance in point, stands recorded in the *Irish Methodist Magazine* for February 1812, page 94. It would be almost insulting the understanding of a christian, to point out any particular passages of scripture, in support of the doctrine here asserted.

* If this is really the case, he trusts some of his brethren will favour him with an explicit illustration of the doctrine here inculcated.

position. On the contrary, it appears to him to involve a discrepance of sentiment which he in vain labours to reconcile, either to the acknowledged principles of religion, or Mr Wesley's usual accuracy of expression.

From this commentary it would appear, in the first place, that the resolution by which a man determines on becoming a christian, is the spontaneous effort of his own unbiased and uninfluenced will.—"None is forced, but if any *will* be a christian," &c. Here then, the natural will of a man is supposed to be fully competent, and that alone, to constitute him a christian. But, in the next moment we are told that it is a fundamental maxim in the christian religion, that its votaries must in all things deny their own will! Consequently that will, by which they constitute themselves the followers of Christ, must be abrogated; it is dismissed from the service of religion, because it is their own, and therefore uniformly at variance with the will of God!

In this short passage, the following maxims appear to be laid down or assumed, as fundamental principles of christianity: First, "It is by the free and unbiased exercise of his natural will, and by that alone, that any man can become and continue to be a real christian. Yet, secondly, The will of every man, whether converted or unconverted, is uniformly opposed to the will of God in all things! Thirdly, Therefore his will must never be indulged in any case, but in all things denied." Consequently, inasmuch as it was his own will to become and continue a christian, that will must be abrogated

and denied, in order to enable him to do the more acceptable will of God*.

A little farther in the same note we find a rule laid down, whereby to discover in all cases what is the will of God concerning us. "Let us remember then," saith Mr Wesley, "(what can never be sufficiently inculcated,) that *God is the author of all events;* that none is so small or inconsiderable as to escape his notice and direction. Every event, therefore, declares to us the will of God, to which, thus declared, we should heartily submit." There are many in the Methodist connexion who would not venture to join Mr Wesley in the maintenance of this position, that "God is the author of all events." If it is actually supported by matter of fact, then it would appear that the uniform self-denial of men is not so necessary as was at first imagined, in order to their doing the will of God; for that will is already accomplished and proclaimed in every event of human life!

* Much as the author venerates the memory, and esteems the writings of Mr Wesley (and he appeals to the Searcher of hearts that he does both in a very high degree,) yet he finds it absolutely impossible to take any other meaning out of these words than what is here expressed. If it is an erroneous explanation, he shall be happy to be put in possession of the genuine one. But as the consequence deduced from the premises here laid down, though inevitably resulting from them, cannot by any means be admitted; we are constrained to believe, that Mr Wesley on this occasion has mistaken his premises, and that when our Lord declared that "if any man would be his disciple, he must deny himself;" he did not mean to say that "in all things he must deny his own will." For certain it is, that in a

Yet Mr Wesley insists on self-denial, that is, as he explains it, denying our own will, being indispensably necessary in every given instance, even in those believers whose souls are fully redeemed by the blood of Christ, and washed from their sins in the laver of regeneration. Nay, not only in these, but in the angels of God, who, as we believe, cordially do the will of God in heaven; in these also, it appears, the same necessity for the denial of their own wills exists as in the saints upon earth, and, by a parity of reasoning, it will remain with the glorified saints in their celestial abodes, through the countless ages of eternity. Still, it would appear, there will be a perpetual discordance between the will of God, and those of his intelligent creatures, though reigning

"High in salvation's climes,"

which requires their constant self-denial, the uniform renunciation of their own wills.

thousand instances the wills of natural and unregenerate men coincide with the will of God, particularly if it be true, as asserted above, that "God is the author of all events." And in the minds of regenerate men, the children of God, instead of a perpetual discordance, there is an almost uniform concordance of will with that of their heavenly Father. Our Lord, therefore, certainly intended no more in the passage above cited, than that every true disciple of his, should deny himself of all ungodliness of heart and life, and of every sensual gratification, that is incompatible with the purity inculcated by his divine precepts. But the gratifications, for instance, of food, marriage, sleep, and clothing, when enjoyed with temperance, are all perfectly conformable to the will of both God and man.

As this point of doctrine is closely connected with the experience and privileges of the children of God, it demands our serious attention; we shall therefore extract from Mr Wesley's sermon on "Self-denial," the definition we there find of its nature, as well as the ground and reason of its existence. It is always with reluctance and caution we would venture to criticise on the works of the founder of Methodism; and still more so to disturb a stone in the venerable fabric he was the instrument of erecting. Yet we must claim the undoubted privilege of christians and British subjects, in the free investigation of those doctrines which we are called upon to embrace as the medium of our salvation. We must bring them to the test of scripture, of reason, and of experience.

"But what (says Mr Wesley,) is self-denial? "Wherein are we to deny ourselves? And whence "does the necessity of this arise? I answer, the will "of God is the supreme, unalterable rule for every "intelligent nature: equally binding every angel in "heaven, and every man upon earth. Nor can it be "otherwise; this is the natural, necessary result of "the relation between creatures and their Creator. "But if the will of God be our one rule of action in "every thing, great and small, it follows by unde- "niable consequence, that we are not to do our "own will in any thing. Here, therefore, we see "at once the nature, with the ground and reason "of self-denial. We see the nature of self-denial: "it is the denying or refusing to follow our own "will, from a conviction that the will of God is the

" only rule of action to us. And we see the reason " thereof, because we are creatures; because " it is " he that hath made us, and not we ourselves."

" This reason for self-denial must hold, even " with regard to the angels of God in heaven; and " with regard to man, innocent and holy, as he came " out of the hands of his Creator. But a farther " reason for it arises from the condition, wherein all " men are since the fall. We are all now " shapen " in wickedness, and in sin did our mother conceive " us." Our nature is altogether corrupt, in every " power and faculty. And our will, depraved equal- " ly with the rest, is wholly bent to indulge our " natural corruption. On the other hand, it is the " will of God, that we resist and counteract that " corruption, not at some times, or in some things " only, but at all times, and in all things. Here, " therefore, is a farther ground for constant and uni- " versal self-denial."

Without attempting to oppose, in the slightest degree, the wholesome and necessary doctrine of self-denial in its true and legitimate character, we cannot but observe, with all deference, on this passage,—First, That the general rule here laid down as the ground of self-denial, appears to be by no means competent to the establishment of the doctrine. It by no means follows that, because I am a creature of God's formation, my will must be uniformly opposed to that of my Creator. Rather, being created " innocent and holy," my will would spontaneously act in unison with that of my Creator, whose moral image constitutes the essence of my

soul. And this observation applies equally to the angels of God, and to man "innocent and holy as he came out of the hands of his Creator." There must have been a most radical and fatal defect in the original formation of these holy and happy spirits, if the perverseness of their wills demanded the continual pain of self-denial. But Mr Wesley says, "If the will of God be our one rule of action in every thing, it follows, by undeniable consequence, that we are not to do our own will in any thing!" Can this consequence be admitted? Most certainly not. For in ten thousand instances, the will of a christian perfectly concurs with that of God, and in gratifying the one he fulfils the other.

But, secondly, the consequent fall and corruption of mankind is assigned as "a farther reason" for self-denial. Would it not be more correct to represent this as the only reason why it should ever be necessary? For it is by this alone and its consequences, that the rectitude of our nature became perverted, and we deviate from the will and desire of pleasing God. But is it not strange that Mr Wesley, that great advocate for christian perfection, for perfect holiness, for full conformity, both inward and outward, to the mind that was in Christ,—and complete restoration to the spiritual and moral image of God, consisting in righteousness and true holiness, entire purification of the heart, and the dedication of the whole faculties of body, soul, and spirit, to the glory of God, and all this flowing from a voluntary self-operating principle, infused into the soul by the di-

rect agency of the holy spirit of God; is it not a little mysterious that, in the midst of all this holiness and purity, Mr Wesley should leave the human will, that main spring of our actions, in possession of all its original perverseness, obstinacy, and rebellion, constantly opposing and counteracting the will and designs of God concerning us! "Here therefore (saith the concluding sentence,) is a farther ground for constant and universal self-denial." That ground is "the corruption of human nature," which of course must constantly and universally prevail! Yea, prevail over the holiest saints upon earth, otherwise this cause for self-denial must cease to operate in them.

There can be no question as to the absolute necessity of self-denial in its strongest sense, and the uniform surrender of our own wills, in all cases wherein they oppose the will of God, and consequently have a tendency to frustrate his gracious designs towards us. But from whence Mr Wesley derived the notion, that there is no possibility of a perfect coincidence of will between God and his holy angels, or redeemed saints; and that nothing more than a forced conformity can be expected from the holiest of them, it is not easy to conjecture: but certainly he held this opinion, and it must be confessed it appears very strange, and altogether incompatible with a state of either perfect holiness or perfect happiness. For the necessity of the denial of the will of a creature, in order to his submission to that of the Creator, implies first an opposition of sentiment

and desire,* and these, if not absolutely sinful, are at least inconsistent with that state of perfect harmony, which we are taught to believe is essential to a state of consummate blessedness. And secondly, it implies an abatement of happiness; for every instance of self-denial is attended with disappointment, and consequent pain of mind. It is taking up a cross and enduring some degree of mental suffering, which, in particular cases, might possibly excite a degree of discontent, and perhaps of inward or even outward murmuring; and if this can find place

* We are perfectly aware, that our blessed Lord when upon earth, though a pattern of perfect holiness, once resigned his own will, to do and suffer that of his heavenly Father. But then, Jesus was in a state of humiliation and suffering, and the exemption from pain and death, which as man he desired, was perfectly innocent and lawful; and had he insisted on that exemption, God would have infallibly granted it, for he had a right to claim it, inasmuch as his suffering was altogether voluntary and vicarious. A case perfectly similar to this can never occur with any other person, therefore it will seldom apply as a precedent; but cases may occur in which believers may innocently desire exemption from crosses and afflictions which the providence of God lays upon them; and in which, such desire is attended to and gratified by their heavenly Father. In fact, this is every day's experience, and it is one proof, that an uniform denial of our own will, is not an essential branch of the religion of Christ. Nay, our Lord himself teaches us to expect the gratification of our wills in a thousand instances, particularly in those passages where he says "Ask what ye will in my name, and it shall be given unto,—I will do it for you: Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." &c. (John, xiv. 13. xv. 7. xvi. 24.) Indeed, every prayer we offer up to God, is founded upon a desire and an expectation that our own will may be gratified in it.

in heaven, the security of the felicity of the saints in those abodes of happiness, would appear to rest on very precarious and uncertain foundations. It was a discrepance of desire that produced the original discordance of will between "the angels who kept not their first estate" and their adorable Creator; and we know that this inward alienation of mind, soon ripened into open rebellion, and terminated as might be justly expected, in the expulsion of those once happy spirits from their exalted state of felicity and glory*, their transformation into devils, and their

* About two or three years since a preacher, on the spot where this is written, gave very great offence to numbers in the society, by announcing on principles similar to those above stated, the precarious state of the celestial happiness of the redeemed children of God in their Father's kingdom. The preacher in question is at least a rank Arminian: some suppose him a Pelagian. In supporting the doctrine of free will, he of course carried it into heaven; but he unfortunately took along with it the peccability of human nature; and hence, reasoning on the free agency of intelligent creatures in a state of felicity, he insisted there was a possibility that this principle might at one period or other, induce its possessor to forfeit his allegiance to God, and so become liable to be banished from the realms of felicity, now no longer eternal, down to the doleful regions of endless torment. One or two persons were found to support and defend this doctrine; but the great majority rejected it with abhorrence; and of these, some ventured so far into the regions of what may possibly be designated as Calvinism, as to assert the absolute impossibility, that a glorified saint should ever forfeit his allegiance to his God, abandon his holiness, or be deprived of his eternal felicity. These last sentiments were founded on the following principles:

First.—Their state of trial is over; with them all temptation

consequent banishment into the lake of unquenchable fire.

Upon a review of this part of the question, it would appear that the absolute uniform renunciation of our own wills, forms no part of the christian religion, and that Mr Wesley inadvertently ran into an error in asserting it. For what is the essence of religion? Is it not an inward and voluntary conformity to the mind and will of God? So far then as this prevails in any human heart, so far a coincidence and uniformity of will prevails between God and his redeemed creature. Nor is this the effect of any coercion or constraint. It is the peculiar glory of the christian religion that it produces an unanimity of sentiment, a reciprocal affection, a coincidence of desire, and a concurrence of will, between its redeemed subjects and their adorable Saviour. Upon these, the happiness of the children of God is founded, and this we know is the object nearest the heart of their Redeemer. Now happiness consists in the gratification of the desires, not in the crossing

ceases, and all peccability is destroyed. This is essential to a state of perfect rest, and consummate felicity.

Secondly.—They are united to the immaculate Jesus, the Son of God; living members of his spiritual body, and one spirit with him. Therefore, unless the head can fall, the members must remain with him in a state of endless felicity.

Thirdly.—God, who cannot lie, hath engaged his truth, that their felicity shall be commensurate with his own eternity. Unless, therefore, the divine wisdom can be circumvented, the divine power be defeated, and the truth of God fail, the glory and happiness of the saints must be eternal. There, at least, God will reign in their souls, "the Lord of every motion."

of the wills of intelligent creatures. If God, therefore, wills the happiness of his children, he wills the gratification of their desires; but as these cannot promote that happiness unless they are holy and in unison with the divine attributes, so we find the wisdom and goodness of God has laid the foundation of our felicity, by imparting to the true believer "the mind that was in Christ Jesus."* As this, and the blessed dispositions it infuses prevail in the soul, all discordance ceases, and the necessity of self-denial, that is, the crossing of our own will, ceases along with it; for our own will then acts in perfect unison with that of our heavenly Father; and this is the essence of sanctification.

In contemplating, however, the general principle of the conformity of the wills of rational beings to that of their Creator, in order to our obtaining accurate views, and forming just conclusions upon the question, we must advert to the different states of those creatures, and the mode of their relationship to God their Creator. In the celebrated prayer taught by our blessed Lord to his disciples, we find the general principle inculcated, that the will of God should be universally done, and the pattern of its perfect fulfilment is held forth from heaven to earth. This, therefore, is a first principle. Now the first class of intelligent beings who are the objects of this principle, are the angels of God. In their original formation God endued these happy spirits with understanding, will, and affections. The

* Philippians, ii. 5.

great object of these noble and Godlike powers, was the contemplation, love, and adoration of their glorious Creator. Doubtless they also saw, admired, and loved the divine image shining in and reflected from each other; but, however diversified in their operation, the faculties of the angelic mind must act under the influence of some governing principle, impressed upon it by the hand of its Creator. That principle we know was love. And as this principle operated upon minds enlightened with the most perfect knowledge of the divine will, (which indeed in that happy state, could have no object but the union of their happiness with the display of his own glory,)—so the confidence those holy and intelligent beings reposed in the divine wisdom and goodness, in conjunction with the purity of their nature, secured a most perfect coincidence of will and reciprocal affection between the Triune God and those his first-born sons in their state of ineffable glory and unsullied felicity. Discordance of will found no place here; there was no circumstance to give it birth; universal harmony, peace, and happiness prevailed; these were cemented by perfect love: and hence we must conclude neither the occasion for self-denial nor the thing itself could possibly exist in this state of consummate felicity.

It is however highly probable, that a period arrived in which the wisdom of God saw fit to put the love and fidelity of these happy creatures to the test. They entered for a moment on a state of probation. The occasion of this has been conjectured, and with much plausibility, to have been that of the announce-

ment of the divine determination, to create another race of beings, over whom his only begotten Son should reign in endless glory and felicity. Possibly it was revealed, that this new race should in the first instance be inferior to the angelic powers, and clothed in a material body. New acts of adoration and praise were doubtless elicited by this fresh display of the divine goodness and power. In some of the angelic host, however, emotions of a different nature were possibly excited. These abusing their elevated powers, probably began to reason against the expediency of introducing a new and inferior race of beings, who should divide with them the love and favour of God; and thus presuming to question the wisdom of the divine counsels, they soon reasoned themselves into pride, discontent, and rebellion.

Hence the origin of evil. It resulted from the abuse of those powers of self-government, with which the wisdom of God invested his intelligent creatures. We are not certain that any external act indicative of this internal rebellion took place. It was not necessary for the purpose of ascertaining the guilty spirits; the existence of the principle was a breach of the love and fidelity, which must ever reign in the mansions of glory. Nor would the suppression of this principle, by an act of what may be termed self-denial, have presented any acceptable apology for its existence. The retension of a sentiment hostile to the will of God, however its gratification may be restrained, constitutes an act of treason against the majesty of heaven. It could have

no place among those first-born sons of God; and hence the instant expulsion of those who harboured it, from their state of primeval happiness and glory.

Next in rank to the angelic powers, stood the first branches of human nature. On our first parents God impressed his own divine image of righteousness and true holiness; he endued them with mental and corporeal powers suited to the state in which they were placed, and calculated to enable them to glorify their Creator in all things; and endowed them with a rich and splendid external inheritance. He gave to them also a governing principle of love in their souls, and surrounded them with every possible motive to persevere in that state of holiness and felicity, in which his goodness and wisdom had originally fixed them. But he placed them in a state of probation; he suspended the continuation of their felicity upon their own fidelity, and he put their love and obedience to its proper test. Created with fixed principles, which directed them to pursue their own happiness in the gratification of those desires which God had implanted in their hearts; and sufficiently enlightened to discern the path which secured the permanence of their felicity,—he restrained their gratification only in one single point, to the transgression of which he annexed the punishment of death.

The immediate object of that restraint was in itself trivial; nor was the breach of the commandment accompanied by any intrinsic moral evil. The immorality of the action consisted in the violation of the divine command, and in that alone; and such a

test as this was, eminently displayed the wisdom, while it manifested the equity of the divine government. Man had a liberty of choice, the temptation to transgression was slight, and presented no apology for its perpetration. Still, however, a natural desire, a thirst after greater knowledge and higher felicity, prompted to disobedience. This principle was legitimate; it came from the God of nature, and it was good. Its gratification, therefore, in every other instance was lawful, and the necessity of abstinence, in that particular case, arose only from the prohibition which the sovereignty of God had enjoined. No natural cause of self-denial could have existed in our first parents; for this would have implied a discrepance of desire, an irregularity of appetite, utterly incompatible with the excellence of a nature perfect in its degree; and would have been indicative of an imperfection in the divine economy and political government, taken in conjunction with that nature, highly derogatory to the wisdom and goodness of the great Creator.

We see then, that the self-denial imposed on our first parents, consisted only of one solitary instance of restraint, and that merely respecting a sensual gratification, which indeed was not intrinsically immoral, but prohibited only as a test of their obedience and fidelity. This circumstance indicates the purity of their nature, and its exact conformity in moral principle to the nature of God; for no immoral tendency, bias, or inclination, could be found in them as the object of restraint or self-denial, and therefore, an external object was of necessity resorted to, as

the test of their fidelity. This, therefore, demonstrates, that no internal cause of self-denial existed in our first parents: their judgments, their desires, their affections, their wills,—in short, their whole spiritual and intellectual nature was a complete transcript of the divine mind, harmonising in perfect unison with the mind and will of God, and governed by the principle of love, which pervaded every faculty of the soul, producing a cordial coincidence of will, and a deep communion and fellowship with the glorious author of their existence. The only self-denial these creatures were capable of suffering, was to abstain from loving and rejoicing in God; but if there was a natural possibility of this abstinence, there certainly was no moral possibility of it; for God himself was the fountain of their spiritual life, and from him they continually derived a plenitude of joy unspeakable and full of glory. The providence of God also was engaged to secure their felicity so long as they continued faithful to their contract, and that felicity consisted in the gratification of their own desires.

Such was the case of man in his primeval state of holiness and happiness; but having lost these by a wilful transgression of the divine command, his relative situation, with respect to his Creator, underwent a complete change. His intercourse with God was broken off; and hence his desires became irregular, and his affections alienated from the source of all happiness, his understanding was darkened, his judgment perverted, and his will ran counter to the will of God; and losing the proper government

of his mind, his passions assumed the reins, and he was precipitated into an abyss of misery and woe. In this state all idea of a voluntary conformity to the will of God is out of the question; he submits with reluctance to the restraints which, as the moral governor of the universe, God in his providence imposes upon him; and against these his stubborn spirit rises in frequent acts of rebellion.

But mercy and grace interpose by virtue of the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, and a new principle is gradually infused. The object of this is to counteract the vicious inclinations of our hearts, to inform our judgments, correct and regulate our passions, give a new bias to our affections, and influence our wills to embrace the gospel terms of salvation, and to regenerate our souls. It is in the progress of this work that self-denial has its proper use and most extensive latitude. Still in a considerable degree under the influence of "the carnal mind, which is enmity against God," coveting, and delighting in the excess of sensual gratification, and surrounded with temptations calculated to excite our cupidity; and allurements destructive of piety but coinciding with the inclinations of the soul; it is only in a stern denial, and vigorous resistance of our predominant desires, we can hope to obtain the victory over them.

But yet it is evident to the slightest observation, that even in this case, it is the desires and inclinations of the mind originating in the affections of the soul, that are the subjects of restraint and denial, and not, properly speaking, the will; for this

noble faculty coinciding with the judgment, is already engaged on the side of God and his grace, though the affections still cleave to the things of time and sense. This fact is eminently illustrated by St Paul in his Epistle to the Romans*, where personating a man under the convincing power of the law, and yet partially restored by grace, he saith, "For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members." The will of this man, therefore, concurs in principle with the law and will of God, and hence we see the self-denial which he is called to practice consists not in the crossing his will, but in the counteraction of that "law of sin in his members," which militates against both his judgment and his will†. Mean time, in a variety of local circumstances relative to his life and conduct, there is a general coincidence between his will and the providence of God, and this

* Chapter vii. 18.-23.

† Mr Charles Wesley, in one of his beautiful hymns, justly ascribes to the grace of God that influence which corrects the will, and gives it a liberty of choice, if not a bias to obedience, in the great work of regeneration. That heaven-born bard, in his celebrated hymn on Universal Redemption, sings,

"A power to choose, a will to obey,
Freely his grace restores;
We all may find the living way,
And call the Saviour ours."

supersedes the supposed necessity of an uniform abandonment of his own will, to enable him to do the will of God.

But again: the prevalence of corruption is asserted to be one ground for the universal and continual practice of self-denial. But we contend for the extermination of that corruption in the hearts of the children of God. Now, if we are correct in this, it is plain that where that corruption is purged away, the necessity of self-denial, arising from this source, expires along with it; for no cause can operate after it ceases to exist. In fact we believe that when a soul is fully converted to God, there is a perfect coincidence of principle between that soul and its redeeming Saviour, which, pervading every faculty of the mind, produces a concurrence of sentiment, an uniformity of design, and a co-operation of both will and power, which annihilates the opposition that formerly dwelt in that soul against the will and grace of God. And this we conceive to be essential to the enjoyment of either holiness or happiness, even so far as these blessings are to be attained in this life. Yet so long as we are in a state of probation, so long as crosses, afflictions, and trials, are requisite for the exercise of our graces, to accomplish the designs of God in us or others, and to advance our own ultimate felicity, so long we may be called upon to surrender some of the innocent desires of our hearts, in obedience to the will of our heavenly Father. But then we do this most willingly, and consequently it is not our wills, but our inclinations that are the subjects of this cross.

A person possessing the most perfect purity of heart, may feel a powerful inclination to do, or to avoid a certain thing, which though perfectly innocent and lawful in itself, may, nevertheless, not coincide with the particular design of providence. But there is in that man's mind an entire coincidence of principle, with the general will of God, and against this principle it is impossible his will can offer any designed opposition. No sooner, therefore, does his judgment inform him of the particular will of God in the given case, than the opposite inclination instantly subsides, being subdued by the pre-existing rectitude of his will, and governed by the principle of love, which pervades every faculty of the mind. Thus did the blessed Jesus surrender to the will of his heavenly Father, in the garden of Gethsemene, that innocent inclination, which as a man he felt, to escape the shame and pain of an ignominious death, and the aversion which recoiling nature manifested to drink the bitter dregs of that cup which was due to the crimes of a sinful world. But none will say that the will of Jesus ever presented a designed opposition to the will of God. A determined opposition of will, indicates a contrariety of principle, and this operating in a creature towards its Creator, is demonstrative of an unholy nature. But the existence of an inclination opposed to a particular design of providence, as it does not necessarily involve a discrepance of principle, is perfectly compatible with a state of unsullied purity, either under a probationary trial, or, as in the case of our Lord, in a state of vicarious and expiatory suffering.

We have dwelt thus particularly on the point of self-denial, because the indiscriminate inculcation of this duty, as continually and universally necessary to the doing the will of God, is both ill-founded, and inimical to the happiness, as well as destructive of the privileges of the children of God. It militates also against the glorious doctrine of christian perfection, representing the holiest saints upon earth as having dispositions which continually produce volitions at direct enmity with the mind and will of God. Besides, it presents the holy religion of Jesus, to both friends and foes, with a most unamiable and forbidding aspect; and its divine Author, as opposing by a stern and rigid austerity, every possible gratification of our own wills, and this apparently for no other reason but because they are our own! It exhibits our religion as so defective, and our God so austere, that it is in vain to expect the former will ever produce in us a full, free, and voluntary coincidence of principle, and cordial cooperation with the designs of the latter. Consequently, according to this sentiment, to do the will of God, we must everlastingly renounce our own will.

But we have reason to be thankful that neither scripture nor experience justifies this unfavourable view of our holy religion, or its adorable author. On the contrary, confiding in the integrity of the regenerated heart, under the influence of his holy spirit, the glorious author of salvation, as we have already seen, commands his beloved disciples to ask what they will, in his name, and promises it shall

be done for them. Thereby demonstrating to us, that the will of a true child of God is not of that perverse and obstinate nature, which uniformly opposes the will of God; neither are the precepts of the christian religion of that rigid character, to require a constant denial of our own wills to fulfil them: but, on the contrary, whatever difficulties may accompany the first entrance upon a life of devotion to God, yet the mind of every regenerated believer is susceptible of those holy principles, which produce a regular, uniform, and happy conformity to the will of God, without restraint, coercion, or self-denial. It is the delight of his soul to do the will of his heavenly Father. We shall find these principles maintained in the scriptures of truth, and confirmed by the experience of every sanctified believer in Jesus*.

Section III.—*Of Self-Righteousness.*

Self-Righteousness is that state and disposition of mind, which arrogates to itself the power of fulfilling the whole law of God, satisfying its great

* See Rom. xii. 2.—Eph. v. 17. vi. 6.—Note, that when our blessed Lord saith (John, vi. 38,) that "he came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him," he doth not mean that his will opposed that of God, but that, as man, the plan of salvation did not originate with him, but he undertook it in compliance with the will of God.

and extensive claims, and demanding upon the principles of justice, the reward due to a life spent in a perfect dedication of the powers of both soul and body to the glory of God, and in uniform obedience to the divine will. This state of mind is the result of a combination of ignorance and pride, and if we may believe the testimony of the inspired writers, is peculiarly disgusting and offensive in the sight of God, inasmuch as it is a false and rotten foundation, incapable of supporting a title to eternal happiness; and a refuge of lies, which rejects the sure and tried foundation that God hath laid in Zion, and attempts to lay another, which neither the truth nor justice of God will permit him to sanction.

The scriptures notice and condemn this as a presumptuous, though futile attempt to frustrate and overthrow the glorious plan of salvation established by the wisdom and power of God, in the redemption of mankind by Christ Jesus. The Jews were its principle abettors in the days of the apostles; yet they did it in some degree from a justifiable motive*, although in this instance completely misapplied, viz: a desire to combine their own salvation with the honour and fulfilment of the law of God in their own persons. "For I bear them record (saith St Paul †,) that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge; for they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own

* In some degree justifiable *in them*, because of the legality of their dispensation and whole religious economy.

† Romans, x. 1.-4.

righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."* Whereas, the same holy apostle declares that "it is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saveth us, by the laver of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. That being thus justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the (gospel) hope of eternal life."† Agreeably to which sentiment, we find St Paul on another occasion praying that he may "be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ; the righteousness which is of God by faith."‡

But if there were self-righteous Pharisees among the Jews in the days of the Apostles, so there are an abundance of them among professing christians in our day. Many of these are to be found in various religious sects in our own age and country, and to our sorrow, not a few among the Methodists. It is true, these do not all imagine that their own works are of a nature and excellence competent to meet the demands of the righteous law of God; and

* Romans, x. 1.-4.

† Titus, iii. 5.-7.—The concluding sentence of this quotation proves a point asserted in a former part of this work, viz. "That it is as justified believers, and not merely as pardoned rebels, the children of God possess their evangelical title to everlasting life."

‡ Philippians, iii. 9.

therefore they are not properly Jewish Pharisees* : but they appear to think themselves competent to the performance of all christian duties, as the condition of their admission into the favour of God, and the support of their title to heaven ; and in this point of view they may with great propriety be styled Christian Pharisees. If we pay attention to the experience detailed in our class meetings, we shall find a great number of our people express themselves as depending almost entirely upon their own works for

* Notwithstanding this concession, the author is sorry to say that he has heard sentiments delivered from a Methodist pulpit, which bear a strong resemblance to the principles here condemned. For instance ; on the morning of Sunday the 25th. of April 1813. in the town where this is written, a preacher, the superintendant of the circuit, his colleague Mr B.——, being in the pulpit behind him, delivered the following sentiments, and as nearly as could be remembered in the same words, " That as a child or a servant is conscious of having faithfully fulfilled, or even exceeded the expectations or commands of his parent or master ; so the faithful christian, rejoicing in the consciousness that he fulfils, or even exceeds his duty to God and man, acquires thereby a degree of *self-importance and self-sufficieney* (these two phrases were particularly marked,) which raises him in his own esteem, as well as in that of God and the holy angels, above the rest of mankind." These words were taken down immediately after the sermon, the text being, as the author recollects, " For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience," &c. (2 Cor. i. 12.) The whole sermon, and indeed almost all that gentleman's sermons, running in the same strain.

Now, we are constrained to say, that the principles here inculcated are the essence of Pharisaic pride and self-righteousness, as far from the truth of christianity and the genuine spirit of humility which it inspires, as it is from the principles of ori-

their acceptance with God: hence you perceive the principal part of their experience consists in a conviction and acknowledgement of their short-comings and unfaithfulness, with resolutions and promises of amendment. This story is repeated over and over again, from week to week, but still the promised amendment is postponed to a future period, and probably never makes its appearance at all. Yet in the absence of the real reformation, the resolution and promise comes in for a considerable share of our confidence, and is no doubt the ground of much self-gratulation.

Can any thing be more opposite to the genuine principles of the gospel, than this spiritual drudgery? Without the animating principle of a lively faith in

ginal Methodism. Personal expostulation had been repeatedly tried with that preacher, as well as his colleague, by several members of the society; but, though conducted in the most friendly and christian-like spirit, it produced nothing but irritation, obstinacy, and resentment. It was therefore not resorted to on this occasion. But the question is now laid home to Mr B——'s conscience, whether on that occasion he faithfully remonstrated with Mr S——, on the injurious tendency of the principles promulgated in that sermon, and which, if his own general doctrine was true, he well knew were destructive of the truth, as it is in Jesus? This was a duty he owed to God and his own conscience, although the success of it might be very doubtful; for the temper of the author of that sermon has been aptly compared by some of his friends and admirers, to "a piece of the best *steel*: you may break (say they), but you cannot bend him." Is this peculiar obstinacy of temper then an ornament to the christian religion: is it an amiable trait in the character of a minister of the gospel?

the merits of Christ, and consequently destitute of the divine influence of the spirit and grace of God, multitudes of our people drag on a lifeless profession, having a form of godliness, but without the power of it, in either their hearts or their lives; yet still confiding in the hopes and promises of future amendment.

Why are these hopes so generally frustrated, and those promises so frequently broken? Because they are branches of our self-righteousness, they spring out of that "root of bitterness," which troubles so many of our societies, and retains so many lukewarm and unholy professors among us. These have never been stripped of their Pharisaic garments: never came as guilty, miserable, poor, blind, naked, and perishing souls, to "the lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world:" never obtained from him the sterling gold of the sanctuary, that they might be truly rich: never were clothed with the white raiment of his immaculate righteousness, imputed and imparted, to hide the shame of their nakedness: never had they their eyes anointed with the eye-salve of the gospel of Jesus, to enable them to see either their own deplorable state, or "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord," as the complete and omnipotent Saviour of all who come to him in sincerity and truth. No: they stand at a distance from the sinner's friend; wrapped in a patched and ragged garment of an imaginary righteousness of their own, they approach indeed the temple of the Lord, but it is often to thank God "they are not as other men;" to make some

apology for the accidental rents in their garment, through which some "putrifying sores" may be readily discerned; and to promise, that at their next appearance all shall be mended, and they will not fail to come dressed in a robe of most perfect righteousness, "woven throughout" with the unbroken thread of a complete and uninterrupted obedience!*

To what are we indebted for the extensive prevalence of this deplorable state of mind, among numbers in our societies? Many of them are to this day as ignorant of the gospel plan of salvation, and as full of the notion of reconciling themselves to God "by the deeds of the law," as ever was a disciple of Moses, under his dark and legal dispensation. We owe it in the first place, to the natural propensity which is found in every unregenerated human heart, to seek its acceptance with God by the deeds of the law; a propensity which St Paul every where labours to correct; which the primitive Methodists saw, lamented, and opposed with all their power, as eminently destructive of the genuine work of grace in the heart of man; but which is unhappily fostered and cherished by the blind zeal of some of our teachers in the present day. And hence we trace much of the barrenness of our christian experience, and the paucity of vital godliness, so much and so deservedly complained of among us.

A second cause of this will probably be found in the general cast of our principles, which, it is evident, have assumed a legal aspect, a bias to strong

* See the ceremony of "The Renewal of the Covenant," treated of in a subsequent chapter.

Arminianism, which is far from being congenial to the genuine spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus, and the evangelical principles inculcated in the gospel plan of salvation. Perhaps the venerated founder of the Methodist societies was himself instrumental in giving this decisive character to the principles of that body over which he presided, which is now too evident to be called in question, and perhaps too deeply rooted to be easily removed. Convinced of the errors of Calvinism, and aware of its tendency to cherish the still more dangerous delusions of Antinomianism, Mr Wesley's zeal for God, and for the honour of the divine law, carried him with a full tide into the bosom of the strongest Arminianism*. In his moments of candour and moderation, however, we find him confessing that the truth lies between these two extremes, and even "at the very edge" of the two former denominations.

* The celebrated Minutes of Conference, of the year 1770, furnish proof of this. Those Minutes will be the subject of discussion in the Appendix to this work; we shall therefore say nothing of them here: but we may here notice an instance, of Mr Wesley's having about that time lost all dread of danger, from the introduction of *legality* into his system of divinity. In a letter to Miss Bishop, of Bath, dated November 5. 1770, he observes:—"I cannot find in my Bible any such sin as legality. Truly we have been often afraid where no fear was. I am not half legal enough, not enough under the law of love." And again, in a subsequent letter to the same lady, of February 16. 1771, he says; "Legality, with most who use that term, really means tenderness of conscience." If legality indeed means the practice of the law of love, and the preservation of a tender conscience, it is plain it cannot be opposed without direct hostility

From the minutes of the second Methodist Conference, held in 1745, we extract the following notes:

"*Question.* Does not the truth of the gospel lie very near both to Calvinism and Antinomianism? —*Answer.* Indeed it does; as it were within a hair's breadth. So that it is altogether foolish and sinful, because we do not quite agree either with one or the other, to run from them as far as we can.

"*Question.* Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism?—*Answer.* 1. In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. 2. In denying all natural free will, and all power antecedent to grace; and, 3. In excluding all merit from man; even for what he does by the grace of God.

"*Question.* Wherein may we come to the edge of Antinomianism?—*Answer.* 1. In exalting the

And from the minutes of the ensuing conference we extract the following:

"*Question.* Can an unbeliever (whatever he be in other respects,) challenge any thing of God's justice?—*Answer.* Absolutely nothing but hell. And this is a point which we cannot too much insist on.

"*Question.* Do we empty men of their own righteousness, as we did at first? Do we sufficiently labour when they begin to be convinced of sin, to take away all they lean upon. Should we not then endeavour with all our might, to overturn their false foundations?—*Answer.* This was at first one of our principal points, and it ought to be so still; for till all other foundations are overturned, they cannot build upon Christ.

"*Question.* Did we not then purposely throw them into convictions? Into strong sorrow and fear? Nay, did we not strive to make them inconsolable? Refusing to be comforted.—*Answer.* We did. And so we should do still, for the stronger the conviction, the speedier is the deliverance; and none so soon receive the peace of God, as those who steadily refuse all other comfort.

"*Question.* Let us consider a particular case. Was you, Jonathan Reeves, before you received the peace of God, convinced, that notwithstanding all you did, or could do, you was in a state of damnation? —*J. R.* I was convinced of it, as fully as that I am now alive.

"*Question.* Are you sure that conviction was from God?—*J. R.* I can have no doubt but it was.

"*Question.* What do you mean by a state of dam-

nation?—*J. R.* A state, wherein if a man dies, he perisheth for ever.

"*Question.* How did this conviction end?—*J. R.* I had first a strong hope that God would deliver me, and this brought a degree of peace. But I had not that solid peace of God, till Christ was revealed in me."

From these extracts we may safely conclude, that when that great and celebrated divine was personally engaged in steering the bark of Methodism through the ocean of contending doctrines, if he occasionally put the helm to either side, he felt the integrity of his own principles sustained by the ballast of truth, which preponderated in his sincere and upright heart, although apparent discrepances may exist in parts of his doctrines.

But all the successors of Mr Wesley did not catch his falling mantle. It has been torn asunder, and patches of it occasionally taken up, to give the colour and semblance of truth to the various sentiments which now divide the Methodist connexion.

Some of these, at least in Ireland, appear to have pulled out of their scraps, every thread of the truly evangelical doctrines which originally tempered the rigid Arminianism of our principles, and this *caput mortuum*, they convert into a bone of contention against many of the most important truths of the gospel, because they say these are tinctured with Calvinism: hence self-righteousness becomes with numbers the *summum bonum* of all religion. And however unpalatable the truth may be to our truly evangelical members, yet we must con-

fess, the principles which give birth to this disposition, ever destructive of that faith and love which are the glory of christianity, are too often proclaimed from our pulpits, embraced and retailed by our leaders, and unhappily imbibed and cherished by the people. And what is, if possible, still worse, when actually detected, they are defended with a bitterness of zeal and an asperity of manner, which, while they demonstrate the pernicious effects of those Pharisaical principles upon the amiable religion of the Son of God, shew that the alarming evil is taking deep root in the hearts of many of our people*.

* It was a conviction of the prevalence of principles and conduct similar to those here reproved, that elicited from the late venerable and pious Mr Fletcher, the following letter, the introduction of which requires no apology to a Methodist reader.

TO MR T. RANKIN

"My Dear Brother, *Madely, June 25,* 1781.

"I thank you for your kind remembrance of, and letter to me. I found myself of one heart with you, both as a preacher and a believer, before I left Bristol; and I am glad you find freedom to speak to me, as your friend in Christ. By what you mention of your experience, I am confirmed in the thought, that it is often harder to keep in the way of faith, and in the light, than to get into it. That speculation and reasoning hinder us from getting into that way, and lead us out of it when we are in it. The only business of those who come to God, as a Redeemer or Sanctifier, must be to feel the want of Redemption and Sanctifying power from on high, and to come for it by simple, cordial, working faith. Easily the heart gets into a false rest, before our last enemy is overcome. Hence, a relapsing into an imperceptible degree of indolence and carnal security. Hence, a dreaming,

Hence arises our formality in religion: we want the animating principle of living faith, and hence that love, which can flow from its divine source through no other channel, waxeth cold; the streams of salvation are intercepted, the springs of redeeming grace are apparently drying up, and we substitute a cold and formal profession, for the heart-cheering religion which characterised the primitive days of Methodism, and distinguished its votaries from the professors of other denominations. We shall ever find that in the same proportion as our self-righteousness prevails, the genuine religion of the gospel, the "righteousness, which is of God by pure

that we are rich and increased in goods. That is one of the causes of the declension you perceive among the Methodists. Another is, the outward rest they have, which is consistent with the selfish views of hypocrites, and with the unbending of the bow of faith, in those who are sincere. Another yet may be, the judging of the greatness of the work by the numbers; which I fear, misleads Mr ****** himself. And so long as he firmly believes Methodism flourishes and increases, it will be almost in vain to offer, or administer remedies to remove declension. However, be the consequence what it will, those who see the evil, should honestly bear their testimony against it, first in their own soul, next by their life; and, thirdly, by their plain and constant reproofs and exhortations. The work of justification seems stopt, because the glory and need of the pardon of sins, to be received and enjoyed now by faith, is not pressed enough upon sinners; and the need of retaining it, upon believers. The work of sanctification is stopped, if I am not mistaken, by the same reason, and by holding out the being delivered from sin as the mark; instead of being rooted in Christ, and filled with the fulness of God. The dispensation of the Spirit is confounded with that of the Son; and the former not being held forth clearly enough, believers in Jesus Christ suppose they have the gift of the Holy

faith in the son of his love," abates, and we dwindle into all the lifeless formality of a lukewarm profession.

Among other fundamental causes which operate in the production of this unfavourable state, may be reckoned an inattention to the distinguished blessings of the glorious dispensation of the spirit under which we live. The holy spirit himself, in the oracles of inspiration, hath clearly pointed out the distinctions between the various dispensations of grace under which the children of men have lived in the different ages of the world; and all the testimonies recorded in that fountain of truth, unite to

Spirit; hence the increase of carnal believers; (See Acts viii. 16. and Acts i. 2.) hence so few spiritual men. I offered my thoughts upon that subject to Mr ******; they were not received; but if I am not mistaken, I am with the four Evangelists, and the first Martyrs. Let us pray, hope, love, believe for ourselves, and call, as you say, for the display of the Lord's arm. My love to your dear fellow-labourer Mr Pawson. Pray for your affectionate brother,

"JOHN FLETCHER."

There are in this valuable letter some interesting hints which our preachers would do well to meditate and improve upon. Few men have ever had clearer or more accurate views of the glorious privileges of the children of God than Mr Fletcher. He here strikes at the root of that self-righteousness which he then saw gaining ground in the Methodist connexion. We cannot but feel some regret that Mr Wesley (who is doubtless indicated by the ******,) did not pay more respect to the representations of this very enlightened and judicious, as well as deeply pious divine. We see the truth of his observations evinced in the present state of the Methodist societies, at least in many parts of Ireland.

prove the vast superiority of that dispensation under which we live, above any preceding medium of salvation. Perhaps no modern divine had clearer views of this important distinction, than the late Rev. Mr Fletcher. What we possess of his sentiments on this interesting subject, while it convinces our judgments and excites our admiration, leads us to regret that this holy and enlightened man did not bequeath to the church of God, a more copious and satisfactory elucidation of the important truths contained in that deeply mysterious branch of revealed religion.*

But what preacher among us ever glances at the distinction of dispensations? Although containing some of the most interesting privileges of the gospel of Christ, we seldom hear the slightest allusion to this important subject thrown out from the pulpit. On the contrary, we continually hear the principles and doctrines applicable to Judaism, Gentilism, and Christianity (not to mention the more peculiar distinctions of the dispensations of John the Baptist, and of the spirit, as the consummation of that of the Father and the Son,) all blended together in one mass of confusion. So that a man sitting under

* The author has been informed that an explicit and copious work from the pen of that venerable divine on this most interesting subject, being by his singular modesty and humility, submitted to the criticism of another eminent minister of that day, was by him altogether suppressed! Who that knows and is able to appreciate the general excellency of Fletcher's writings, but must sincerely regret this very unfortunate circumstance? What an irreparable loss must the church of God have sustained in that suppression!

one of those indiscriminating sermons, is at a loss to know whether he is to seek for salvation as a Jew, a Gentile, or a Christian! It is then little wonder if we see as many self-righteous Pharisees, as humble and faithful witnesses of the redeeming grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in our congregations and societies.

Certain it is, that until a man abandons all hopes of being able by any means, within the compass of his own power, to recommend himself to the divine approbation and favour, he never will stoop to embrace that salvation which is purchased for perishing sinners: and until he renounces all confidence in his own righteousness, he will never be disposed to embrace that perfect and immaculate righteousness, in the imputation and actual enjoyment of which alone, he can find acceptance with God upon earth, or obtain either a title to heaven, or a qualification for the glorious felicity of his redeemed children. Let therefore the holiest saint in our connexion, accompany the weakest believer in Jesus, and while upon the soundest principles of the gospel, they are labouring to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, let them adopt the language and sentiment of our late venerable bard, and sing with Mr Charles Wesley,

"While thus we bestow
Our moments below,
Ourselves we forsake,
And refuge in Jesus's righteousness take.

CHAP. VI.

OF THE SACRED PERSON OF THE SON OF GOD.—CONFUSED IDEAS AND INACCURATE EXPRESSIONS, RESPECTING THE DIVINE AND HUMAN NATURES OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, NOTICED AND CORRECTED.—IMPORTANT QUESTIONS RESPECTING THESE PROPOSED.—OBSERVATIONS THEREON.

THE Methodist societies are well grounded in the fundamental and important doctrine of a trinity of persons in the Godhead. They, perhaps almost to a man, firmly believe in the co-existence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to each of whom they ascribe all the essential attributes of deity; and yet with St Athanasius they unanimously declare, "there are not three Gods, but one God." And agreeable to this orthodox sentiment, it is quite common for them in all conversations upon this important point, as well as in their public discourses and writings, to contend earnestly for the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not about to call in question the accurate propriety of this most orthodox principle: but as there are sometimes vague and inaccurate expressions used in our descriptions of that divinity, it might be well to reduce these to such a certainty of meaning, and correctness of language, as may exclude the appearance of inconsistency from the doctrines we inculcate, respecting the sacred person of our adorable Lord and Saviour.

The point to which those inaccuracies appear principally to attach, is the confounding the divine and human natures of the great author of salvation; occasionally ascribing to the latter the attributes of deity, and to the former, the imbecilities of humanity. This discrepance of expression no doubt arises from the want of a due attention to the fundamental principles upon which the deep and interesting subject of the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ is reposed. Although we readily acknowledge there are mysteries in this divine subject, which will perhaps for ever baffle the researches of finite minds, yet some branches thereof being the objects of distinct revelation, and others necessarily deducible from those, it behoves every minister of the gospel to have his understanding well informed, and his heart well affected towards the important truths which are the objects of our faith, relative to the person and offices of the great high-priest of our profession, and captain of our salvation.

Yet perhaps few among us think it necessary deeply to study this interesting subject: the generality both of preachers and people seem content with a general, but often very confused idea of the divinity of Christ, in support of which they quote indeed many pertinent passages of scripture, but without properly discriminating between the vicarious character of Jesus Christ, and the proper deity of the Son of God. Hence arises frequent confusion of thought, as well as inaccuracy of expression.*

* An instance of this kind occurred not long since, within

According to the soundest principles, the most orthodox doctrine extant in the church of Christ, it appears, that Jesus Christ (signifying the *anointed Saviour*,) is the mediatorial title of our blessed Redeemer, and particularly designates his humanity, both spiritual and corporeal, as the one mediator between God and man, and as the victim of divine justice in our redemption. This is synonymous with the Hebrew term, Messiah. In his divine nature, the Son of God is equal with the Father, and is by

the author's knowledge, which, as it illustrates the present subject, he will relate it.—A preacher, who certainly has no mean opinion of his own talents and orthodoxy, was delivering a discourse from Colossians, i. 12.-18. He admitted, that the terms Jesus Christ applied only to the manhood of our Lord, and were descriptive of his vicarious character, as the saviour of the world, and the only mediator between God and man. And he contended strenuously that his person and character had no kind of existence until the formation of the former in the womb of the virgin mother, and the subsequent developement of the latter in the life and death of Christ. In fact, he denied altogether the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ, prior to his incarnation. Coming, however, to verse 15, where the dignity of primogeniture is expressly ascribed to him above every creature that exists, as an indefeasible predicate of his high and peerless character, he asserted, that this meant nothing more than his priority of resurrection from the dead! Whereas, had he advanced to verse 18, he would have found the priority of resurrection there asserted by the apostle in its proper place, as an additional predicate of our Lord's mediatorial character, in order that, as it is there expressly stated, he might, "in all things have the pre-eminence" over every creature; viz. not only by primogeniture, over both angels and men; but by priority of resurrection over glorified saints. By the first of these his existence before any other creature is clearly demonstrated;

St Paul expressly styled God over all, and blessed for ever (Rom. ix. 5.) and by Isaiah, Emanuel, God with us (Isaiah, vii. 14.) The humanity of Jesus Christ was the temple of the deity, and many who contend for the absolute distinction of persons in the godhead, suppose it was exclusively inhabited by the deity of the second person in the adorable trinity, the Son of God. But against this opinion we have the express testimony of Jesus himself, who uniformly ascribes his great and ex-

and, in the second, his priority of resurrection is expressly asserted, and both are equally necessary to the apostle's conclusion, viz. "That in all things he might have the pre-eminence," to which the point of primogeniture is most essential.

The preacher in question, however, having, as he imagined, thus got rid of the pre-existence of our blessed Saviour, and sunk his birth-right below that of all angels, and three-fourths of the human race, passed smoothly on to the 16th verse, where he began to discover some indications of the great truth asserted by St Paul (1 Eph. iii. 9.) that "God created all things by Jesus Christ." Here he found himself completely embarrassed; but he resolved to *cut* his way through, and being determined, at all hazards, to maintain the divinity of Christ, he triumphantly asserted, that "The almighty Jesus created all things!" That is to say, he ascribed the incommunicable attributes of Deity to that being who, according to his own account, only came into existence in the latter period of the world; and asserted in fact, that he created all things 4000 years before he himself began to exist! This sermon lasted about twenty minutes, at the end of which time (as it was afterwards understood,) *the preacher grew sick;* but a kind of promise was held out of resuming the subject on a future occasion. But as that period never arrived, we may fairly conclude the *sickness* continues to the present day. This lesson ought to have taught that preacher not to be quite so dogmatical and censorious in his future behaviour, as he generally was.

cellent works to the energy of the Father, who dwelt in him*. And we find also it on record in the inspired writings, not only that Christ was originally baptised with the holy spirit in the river Jordan†, but that a plenitude of his sacred influences always filled the human soul of the immaculate Jesus‡. Nevertheless, as our blessed Lord constantly asserted his own unity with the Father§, it is evident that the humanity of Jesus was the habitation of the adorable trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

But there are other interesting questions relative to the person and offices of our Lord and Saviour, respecting which many even of our preachers are perhaps as ill-informed as the majority of their hearers, and yet they are branches of religious knowledge highly necessary to make the former "able ministers of the new covenant," and to render the latter "wise unto salvation." To instance only a very few of these: Does the term "Son of God," as descriptive of our Redeemer's character, apply exclusively to the divine, or the human nature of the Messiah? If to the divine, does it imply a derivation of existence, or what is its true meaning? If, as many imagine, it applies to the human only, then how will you denominate the second person in the trinity, seeing, on that supposition, the proper deity of the Son cannot be maintained? But if the relative

* See particularly John, xiv. 10.—"The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father who dwelleth in me: he doeth the works."—See also Chapter viii. 28, &c.

† Matthew, iii. 16. ‡ John, iii. 34. § John, xiv. 9. 10.

term Son, is applicable to both the divine and human natures of Christ, does this involve both in the circumstance of derivation?

Again: at what period may we suppose the human soul of our Lord began to exist? If we say, with some celebrated writers among ourselves, as well as eminent divines among other denominations, that this first began to exist at the period of its miraculous formation in the virgin's womb, then there was no mediator between God and man, under either the Patriarchal or Mosaical dispensations, seeing St Paul expressly limits that office to "the man Christ Jesus."* Again: By what mode may we suppose the human soul of Christ to have been brought into existence? Was it a mere creation, by the omnipotence of God at the period of its conception? If so, how stands he spiritually related to human nature? Whereas, to constitute him an eligible sacrifice for the human race, was it not requisite that he should be both spiritually and corporeally identified with that nature he was destined to redeem? But if, on the other hand, the soul of Jesus was miraculously derived from that of his virgin mother (as that of Eve is supposed to have been from Adam,) then by what means was it exonerated from the burthen of corruption said to be inherent in, and propagated with every human soul? It must have partaken of her nature.

Again: In the penal sufferings and vicarious death of our blessed Lord, did the manhood of Christ sus-

* 1 Timothy, ii. 5.

tain the the whole weight of that direful penalty, or are we at liberty to embrace the vulgar notion, that the godhead of Christ endured a portion of the sufferings? But is not the latter notion utterly incompatible with the acknowledged attributes of deity, who is incapable of suffering? And is not this idea discountenanced, if not confuted by the express testimony of scripture, which informs us, first, that an angel appeared to our Lord, and strengthened him in his agony:* now it is certain the deity could not require any support from a creature! But, secondly, our Lord himself in his expiring cry, pathetically complains of the withdrawing of the divine presence from him, in the last extremity of his inconceivable agony †. And indeed this abandonment appears to have been an inseparable appendage to the awful circumstances in which our Lord was then placed; for he there represented the sinful race of Adam, and was at that tremendous moment enduring the excessive penalty of divine vengeance, due to the aggregate sins of the world. But the consolatory presence of God was incompatible with that direful predicament in which the love of Jesus had plunged his righteous soul, to enable him to atone for our transgressions. ‡ Yet there must assuredly have

* Luke, xxii. 43. † Matthew, xxvii. 46.

‡ It has been supposed, and pretty generally, that the human nature of our Lord was inadequate to sustain the weight of vengeance due to the sins of mankind, unsupported by the deity. If the author of this work lives to publish a *Treatise* on this deep and interesting subject, the MS. of which is now in a state of forwardness, he hopes to be able to shew the contrary on the most satis-

been something superlatively great and excellent in the human character of our Lord, when an inspired prophet is found to describe him as "the man that is the almighty's fellow".*

But we have frequently heard unguarded expressions even from Methodist pulpits, by no means consistent with the orthodoxy of our general principles, respecting the sacred doctrine of an Unitarian Trinity in the divine nature; and even some of our hymns, excellent as those admirable compositions generally are, both for their sentiments and language, present some instances of expressions, which, after making all reasonable allowances for the flights of poetry, are by no means either justifiable or decorous. As an instance of the former, a preacher of the first rank among us, has been heard to describe the Father as "the fountain of deity;" indicating thereby, that both the Son and spirit derived both their existence and godhead from the Father. But how is this sentiment to be reconciled to our general notions of the perfect equality of the three sacred persons, as co-eternal in their existence, and co-equal in dignity, authority, and power? "In this trinity

factory grounds, and to exhibit the human nature of Christ rescued from that state of imbecility and degradation to which the vulgar errors of mankind have reduced it; and exalted to that superior rank in creation which the scriptures uniformly ascribe to it. The queries and observations above stated, are designed principally to shew the imperfections of the common hypothesis relative to the person of our glorious Redeemer, and the impossibility of solving many difficulties relative to his sacred character and offices, upon the principles commonly propagated among us.

* Zechariah, xiii. 7.

(saith Athanasius, the great oracle of Trinitarianism,) none is afore or after other; but the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal." How then is "the Father alone the fountain of deity?"

Another most exceptionable and erroneous mode of expression which has sometimes fallen from high authority in our pulpits, is, "that the eternal God was made man, suffered and died upon the cross, for us men, and our salvation," &c. &c. Is it so then, that the ever blessed God hath changed his nature, and from being the eternal, self-existent, immortal deity, hath become a feeble, suffering, mortal man? By no means! But our hymns support the same sentiment; in them we sing,

> "The immortal God for me hath died!"—And,
> "I thirst for a life-giving God,
> A God that on Calvary died!"

Tenderness for the feelings of those who have inadvertently been drawn into the use of those most unjustifiable expressions, induces us to mollify the censure they so richly deserve. And although they carry their own condemnation on their face, yet in condescension to the weakness of many of our brethren, we shall reason for a moment on their great and unqualified absurdity.

And first let us ask, do the oracles of inspiration inculcate any such doctrine,—do they authorise any such language, as is here made use of? Most certainly not. The plain testimony of scripture on

this important point, is "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,"* sanctifying, preparing, and dedicating the immaculate humanity of Jesus, to become a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. The humanity of Jesus is the fairest image of the divine nature; in it dwelt and shone forth "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;"† it was and still is the glorious habitation of the triune God, in and through which all the perfections of the deity are exhibited and reflected on every other creature. God is, and probably ever was inaccessible to all other created beings, but through the humanity of Jesus Christ; for he is "the first-born of every creature,—and the beginning of the creation of God,"‡ and in all things he has, ever had, and ever will have the pre-eminence above both angels and men.

And because the humanity of Jesus is the glorious habitation of the Deity, it is said, "God was manifest in the flesh;"§ that is, when Jesus took our corporeal nature upon him, as we had previously partaken of his spiritual nature, then the glorious attributes of the godhead, which dwelt in the man Christ Jesus, were exhibited in all their native lustre, to the admiration of both angels and men. In the person of our glorious Redeemer were united the perfections of both the divine and human natures; and hence, by a strong figure of speech, the precious blood, which the holy Jesus shed for the

* 2 Cor. v. 19. † Col. ii. 6 ‡ Col. i. xv.—Rev. iii. 14.
§ 1 Timothy, iii. 16.

remission of our sins is styled by an inspired apostle, the blood of God*.

But is any one among us weak enough to conclude from this figurative expression, that the eternal God literally shed his blood for us? This preposterous notion would be incomparably more grossly absurd than the Popish doctrine of transubstantiation. The idea of a suffering and expiring deity is so repugnant to our enlightened reason, so degrading to the divine character, so much at variance with the principles of all theology, and so subversive of every attribute of the godhead, that it is beyond measure astonishing how such a notion could ever find its way into the doctrines of christianity; or that any figurative expression of scripture could, by men of sense, be ever tortured into the support of a doctrine so full of absurdity and contradiction. It is deifying the material body of the blessed Jesus, and laying the foundation of the grossest idolatry, in the very person of the immaculate Son of God. Doubtless the idolatry of the mass originally sprang out of this absurd notion of a corporeal deity; whereas, we know that "God is a spirit, whom no man hath seen, nor can see:"† and they that worship him acceptably must do it "in spirit and in truth."

While, therefore, we admit most cordially the sound and scriptural doctrine of the trinity of persons in the deity, and worship them under the sacred titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let us be most

* Acts, xx. 28. † John, iv. 24.—1 Timothy, vi. 16.

guarded against materialising the ineffable perfections of the deity. Let us not attempt to incorporate the imbecilities and infirmities incident to flesh and blood, with the essential attributes of the godhead; but always carefully discriminate between the sufferings of the man Christ Jesus, and the essential glory of the second person in the adorable trinity; nor, by distorting a figurative expression of the inspired writers, attempt to establish thereon a doctrine so full of absurdity, so shocking to common sense, and so destructive of all principle, as the death of God! No: let us not thus expose ourselves to the contempt and censure of other denominations of christians; nor any longer clog the religion of Christ with absurdities which render both it and us the laughing stock and abhorrence of Jews, and infidels of every description.

In all our expressions relative to the sufferings and death of our adorable Redeemer, let us remember it was the *man Christ*, who indured those sufferings and underwent that penalty; it was simply the body, flesh, and blood of Jesus Christ that tasted of death; it was his blood that was shed for the remission of our sins, and it was both the body and soul of Christ Jesus, the immaculate Lamb of God, which were offered up as an atoning sacrifice, and accepted as a satisfactory ransom for the souls and bodies of all other men. That precious body and immaculate soul had been and still are in their glorified state, the habitation of the godhead; but that soul and body were not God; nay, in the last agony of piacular suffering, the deity appears to have with-

drawn his sacred presence from the awful scene, and left the "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," to sustain, by virtue of his incomparable powers, the weight of divine vengeance, poured out upon his innocent soul, by a sin-avenging God*.

It is very commonly supposed that the vengeance of God, which was satiated by the blood of Christ, was infinite in its extent, and boundless in its demands; and hence it has been concluded that the deity himself must have participated in the suffering, and have given merit to the atonement, which otherwise could not have been adequate to the purposes of reconciliation upon legal principles. The accuracy of these sentiments may be justly questioned; they appear to be the offspring of a fallacious

* In the consideration of this most delicate point in the mysterious doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, we shall find occasion for all the wisdom and prudence we possess, and for all the light which the oracles of inspiration cast upon this glorious display of the unsearchable counsels of God; lest on the one hand we inadvertently stain the divine glory, by imputing to it the infirmities of humanity; or, on the other, exalt that humanity beyond its proper limits, in the glorious work of redemption; or, thirdly, lest we degrade the superlative dignity of the blessed Jesus in his mediatorial capacity (which St Paul hath limited to his human nature,) below that high and most exalted rank which it fills in the creation of God. Our just and natural dread of the principles of Arianism and Socinianism, may readily drive us into any of those extremes. But in contending for the proper dignity of the spiritual humanity of Jesus Christ, there is no kind of necessity for surrendering the actual divinity of the second person in the ever blessed trinity. On the contrary, the pre-existence of that spiritual humanity, as the medium of ac-

mode of reasoning, unsupported by divine authority, and instituted for the purpose of accommodating a preconceived opinion of an excessive rigour in the divine economy, which even transcends the boundaries of strict justice, and which induced God to require an infinite satisfaction for a finite offence. We call it a finite offence, because, although committed against a being infinite in his perfections, yet it was the transgression of a finite creature who was incapable of performing an infinite act, and it was also the violation of a law instituted for the regulation of the conduct of that finite creature; consequently its terms were suited to the limited capacity of that being, or those beings who were to be its subjects. Now we argue, that if the fulfilment of that law did not demand the exertion of infinite powers, so

cess to God prior to the incarnation of Jesus, its transcendant excellence as the immediate habitation of the deity, and his intimate union with the triune God, appear to be facts not only supported by the ample testimony of scripture, but indispensably necessary for the explanation of many passages which, on any other hypothesis, must for ever remain in the shade of obscurity. Among these we may reckon 2 Cor. viii. 9. Coloss. i. 13.-20. Eph. iii. 9. Philip. ii. 5.-11. Heb. i. 4.-9. Rev. iii. 14. In all which places every judicious and candid mind must perceive strong indications of, and evident allusions to the union of a superlatively excellent created dignity, combined with the essential attributes of deity. And let us remark, that the glorious being who sustains both these characters, is expressly styled "the Lord Jesus Christ," prior to his incarnation. And in almost all the passages above pointed at, many predicates are ascribed to the Son of God, which would be found incompatible with his absolute deity, unless we admit the co-existence of the spiritual humanity of Christ at that period.

neither could its violation require an infinite atonement. That atonement unquestionably had its boundaries, as had the penalty due to the transgression of the law; and those boundaries were fixed by the justice of God: and although these were certainly beyond the ability of fallen man to meet and satisfy (which circumstance alone, insured the eternity of his punishment, without a Redeemer,) yet they did not, they could not, exceed the powers of the man Christ Jesus in the perfection of his human nature, fully to embrace, and completely to satisfy.

For let us never forget, but retain as a first principle, that the law was made for, and given to human nature, and in that nature alone could the wisdom and justice of God look for its fulfilment, or for an adequate atonement for its violation. Hence the necessity that Jesus the great fulfiller should be identified with our nature, and accomplish in it what was demanded by the righteousness of God for our restoration to the divine favour. This principle which appears fully equal to its own support, is nevertheless corroborated by another, equally forceable and conclusive; namely, that it was impossible the godhead could suffer. Of this we must never lose sight; it is a fundamental and an unalterable principle of all theology; and from it we learn that it was the manhood of Christ which endured the penalty due to our transgressions. It is true that manhood was supported and strengthened by the consoling presence of the godhead, throughout the entire course of his immaculate and meritorious life; to this he was entitled even as a righteous man,

but being high in the divine favour, he enjoyed this divine and gracious influence in the richest super abundance. But in the article of death, yea, and for some time prior to that aweful moment, when entering upon his expiatory passion, it would appear that the humanity of Jesus was deprived of that divine consolation, for God no longer treated him as a beloved son and faithful servant, but as the victim of his vengeance against sin and sinners; and in this character he was entitled to no consolation from his heavenly Father: nevertheless, an angel from heaven was deputed to strengthen and support him in the crisis of his sufferings. But had those sufferings been infinite in their nature, it is plain the humanity of Christ, though sustained and strengthened by all the angels of the celestial hierarchy, could not have supported the direful penalty. He must have sunk under the unequal burthen; but those sufferings were without all doubt limited by the wisdom and justice of God and apportioned only to the finite offences of created beings. Yet such was the enormity of human guilt, such the weight of vengeance poured out upon the immaculate soul of our great Redeemer, that when bearing our sins in his own body, even he himself could not have sustained it, had he not been, as already noticed, in the exalted language of the prophet, the almighty's fellow*.

* "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." (Zech. xiii 7.) Many cite this passage as a proof of the divinity of Christ, and of the equality of the godhead of the Son, with that of the Father. But upon a minute attention to the analogy of its parts,

Some who are shocked at the idea of a suffering and expiring deity, endeavour to mollify the rigour of that notion by saying that "The humanity of Christ was offered up upon the divinity; that the altar then sanctified the gift, and stamped the sufferings of Jesus with an infinite value." Plausible as this may appear, it is nevertheless nothing more than an ingenious hypothesis, unsupported by any

we shall probably find that interpretation cannot be supported. For if we speak of the absolute deity of the sacred person in the trinity, it is evident that he is himself "the Lord of hosts" who speaks on this occasion; whereas the language of the prophet is here addressed to a man, that is, to the man Christ Jesus; called by a bold and striking figure, the fellow of the Almighty; first, because of the divinity of which his body and soul were the temple, and the consequent union which subsisted between the triune God and the humanity of Jesus. The soul of Christ (if we may with reverence indulge the comparison,) being to the godhead what our bodies are to our souls, viz: the medium through which we think, act, and speak. So God manifests his glory to men and angels, through the manhood of Christ. Hence he speaks of an union between himself and his God and Father, in which all his living members will finally partake (See John, xvii. 21. 22. xx. 17.) And secondly, on account of his superlative excellency, as being the brightest image, the strongest resemblance of the godhead (See Heb. i. 1. 2.) For if Adam was created in, and reflected the image of God, the man Christ, without all doubt, was, and did so, in an incomparably more eminent degree. But again: the sword is here commanded to awake against this man; against the shepherd of Israel. Was it then against the deity of the Son of God that the sword awaked? By no means: it was sheathed in the immaculate bosom of the man Christ, and satiated its fury in his precious blood; but it assuredly wounded not the godhead of our great Redeemer.

direct testimony of scripture. For although the scripture does affirm in general terms, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," yet it gives us no reason to suppose that the deity took any personal share directly or indirectly in the actual sufferings of Christ. On the contrary, we have already seen good cause for believing that the divine presence was withdrawn, at the important moment of expiation, when the piacular sacrifice of Jesus was completed by the dismissal of his spirit*; and this is indicated by the pathetic exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Let us conclude these remarks by some observations, obviously resulting from the premises. We know it is equally impossible for God to die, or to

* The death of Christ was a voluntary transaction. He offer-himself up as a willing sacrifice to the justice of God, for the sins of mankind. The sacred phraseology which recites the sufferings of our Lord, indicates this. The following illustration of this interesting point, from the pen of Dr Adam Clarke, will not be unacceptable to the pious and learned reader. It is an extract from his commentary on Matthew, xxvii. 50, "Jesus, when he had cried with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost."

"Αφηκε το πνευμα, he dismissed the spirit. He himself willingly gave up that life, which it was impossible for man to take away. It is not said that he hung on the cross till he died through pain and agony; nor is it said that his bones were broken, the sooner to put him out of pain, and to hasten his death; but that himself dismissed the soul, that he might thus become, not a forced sacrifice, but a free-will offering for sin.

"As giving up the spirit, ghost, or soul, is an act not proper to man, though commending it to God in our last moments is both an act of faith and piety; and as giving up the ghost, *i. e.* dismissing his spirit from his body, is attributed to Jesus Christ, to whom

change his nature. Every expression, therefore, indicating either of these acts, should be carefully avoided, as derogatory to the honour and dignity of the divine nature. In this respect God never was made man, any more than he was made bread; his divine nature was never changed into human. And if we renounce the Popish heresy which asserts absolute transubstantiation: let us also reject, with equal abhorrence, every thing which indicates a transmutation of the divine nature. Let us beware of materialising our God, for though we confess that "Jesus Christ did once come in the flesh," and we worship the whole trinity in unity, in the person of our glorious Redeemer, yet we dare not join the Papists in ascribing the attributes of deity, to the corporeal substance of the body of Christ.

On the contrary, we say with St Paul, "though we may have known Christ heretofore after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more."* For the

alone it is proper, I therefore object against its use in every other case.

Every man, since the fall, has not only been liable to death, but has deserved it, as all have forfeited their lives because of sin. Jesus Christ, as born immaculate, and having never sinned, had not forfeited his life, and therefore may be considered as naturally and properly immortal. "No man (says he,) taketh it (*my life,*) from me, but I lay it down of myself; I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again; therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again."—John, x. 17. 18. Hence, we rightly translate Matthew, xxvii. 50. Ἀφηκε το πνευμα, he gave up the ghost, *i. e.* he dismissed his spirit that he might die for the sin of the world."

* 2 Corinthians, v. 16.

flesh and blood of even our Lord himself could not inherit the kingdom of God. It was assumed by him as a temporary vehicle, in which he lived and died, and rose again from the dead; but on his ascension into heaven this was changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and he assumed that glorified spiritual body in which he subsequently appeared to his favoured apostle in the Island of Patmos; in which he now receives the homage of angels and men, and in which also we shall see him at the great and awful day of final retribution. Yea, and what is incomparably more glorious, we shall ourselves be changed into the same image; for an inspired apostle hath declared that, "he shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself." *

Let our principles be founded in truth, supported by revelation, and defended by the concurrent testimony of enlightened reason. These divine springs of knowledge will assure us that the omnipotent God is equally incapable of mortality, of degradation, and of transmutation. But he veils his glories in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The hy-

* Philippians, iii. 21.—Some suppose the glorified body of Jesus still retains the marks of his sufferings, the points of the nails and the scar of the spear. We have no warrant from scripture for supposing any such thing; nor is it probable that a spiritual body, the pattern of all perfection and glory, and the habitation of deity, should retain visible tokens of humiliation, pain, and death, in a state of consummate glory and endless felicity.

postatical union which subsists between the divine and human natures in our blessed Lord, presents to the wondering minds of angels and men, the most glorious display of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God; and will doubtless be the source of endless admiration, and everlasting praise to both angels and the spirits of glorified saints, through the countless ages of eternity. Parts of this ineffable union are the subject of revelation, and these lead us into the contemplation of other circumstances relative to this sacred mystery, which, while they engage the attention of our minds on the most noble and interesting of all subjects, afford us the most ample means of tracing the harmony of the divine attributes as they are concentrated in the glorious plan of redemption, and unite their sacred energy in the person and offices of our adorable Redeemer.

Yet after all our researches, we shall find in these doctrines, mysteries which, with our finite capacities and limited state of knowledge, we in vain attempt to explore. These we must necessarily leave to the issues of eternity: If requisite for a greater display of the divine glory, and the increment of our eternal felicity, there can be no doubt but our enlarged capacities will then be amply gratified with discoveries in the mysterious doctrines of our redemption, which at present are either concealed from our view, or baffle the noblest efforts of our understandings to comprehend. But while we endeavour, with a laudable and pious zeal, chastened with becoming reverence, to explore, as far as our present li-

mits will permit, the unsearchable riches of Christ; to discover the transcendent excellencies of his wonderful nature, and to sound the depth of those fountains of his love, from whence we draw the streams of salvation; let us with the utmost care guard against all discrepances of doctrine, which would both confound our principles and dishonour the glorious author of our salvation *.

Upon the interesting and important subject of the hypostatical union of the divine and human natures in our blessed Lord, the creed ascribed to

* In a former part of this work the question was discussed, Whether our blessed Lord, during his state of trial upon earth, did any thing more than was absolutely requisite to justify his own person as a righteous man? This question was put to the author by a preacher, high in his esteem and affection. In addition to the reply then given, we would here observe, that he certainly did incomparably more than the law required of him, which is indeed implied in the expression then cited from the prophet, that "he magnified that law, and made it honourable." This, however, will more clearly appear if we advert, first, to what the law required; and, secondly, to what Jesus did.—And, 1st, the law required him to love the Lord his God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and his neighbour as himself; and here its demands ceased. Now this command was given to man, and the physical powers of the human soul in each individual were adequate to its satisfaction. But Jesus was more than man in his divine nature, he is "God over all, and blessed for ever;" and, in his human, he was "the first-born of every creature, and the beginning of the creation of God," existing before all angels, and taking precedence, both in rank and power, above all the celestial hierarchy, before as well as after his incarnation; and by virtue of his transcendent powers he loved his God and Father incomparably more than all other men put together. This was manifest in the glorious work he undertook and accomplished, and which united the most splendid display of love to God

Saint Athanasius, contains perhaps some of the clearest and most satisfactory illustrations to be met with in any human composition. From the aphorisms of that compendium of christian faith, as it is

and man, with the restoration of a lost and ruined world to security and happiness.

The law required indeed perfect love to God and man; and this, it is evident, Jesus might have fulfilled in his individual capacity, without offering himself as the mediator between God and man; for the law never required a man to lay down his life for his friend, and much less for his enemy. But Jesus laid down his life for his greatest enemies; and, in doing this, he met, with a redundancy of satisfaction in his own personal righteousness, the demands of the law against every other individual of the human race. Now the object of the law of God is to procure the glorification of the divine attributes, and to unite this with the happiness of mankind. Behold Jesus then accomplishing in his own person both these important points, to an extent which the powers of human intellect in vain attempt to explore. His personal glorification of the divine attributes overbalanced the weight of iniquity which a world of sinners had thrown into the opposite scale of dishonour. His blood washed away the stains of their guilt, both virtually from their own persons, and actually from the injured attributes of deity. And by restoring man to the favour of God, his divine mediation opened a way for the ample display of the perfections of the godhead, and the exercise of his grace in the future salvation, and consequent eternal felicity of millions of the human race, whose vast and eternal weight of glory will sound the praises of his redeeming love through the realms of bliss for ever and ever. It transcends the bounds of finite capacities to estimate a thousandth part of the glory which results to God, and the felicity which is secured to man, by the mediation of Jesus. Look at this, ye astonished saints, and say, will ye compare the righteousness of your glorious Redeemer, and its incomparable effects, to the glimmering sparks of human charity, or the personal righteousness of another

sometimes designated, we learn the important truth, that the union which subsisted during the incarnation of Jesus, between the ever blessed God and the man Christ, did not imply a "conversion of the godhead into flesh, but a taking of the manhood into God; not by confusion of substance, but unity of person," aptly illustrated by the simile of the human frame: "For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ." How far, however, we may venture to coincide with another sentiment contained in this celebrated creed, relative to the derived existence of the godhead of the second person in the adorable trinity, the author of this work will not take upon him to determine. Probably many may suppose it carries its own confutation on its face. Speaking of the deity of the Son, Athanasius says, "He is *God* of the *substance* of the Father, *begotten* before all worlds!" Is not this ascribing *materiality* to the deity, and fixing a *period* at which he was brought into existence, and describing the mode by which this was done? Whereas, according to the orthodoxy of our principles, the *Triune God* is an *eternal spirit*, and his mode of existence totally incomprehensible.

individual of the human race? No, you will not degrade him by the comparison; for however excellent and abundant these may be in saints of the first magnitude, you know the righteousness of Jesus is the fountain from whence they flow! Let him therefore, agreeable to the apostolic injunction, "In all things have the pre-eminence."—Coloss. i. 18.

CHAP. VII.

OF THE FORMALITY OF RENEWING THE COVENANT IN THE METHODIST SOCIETIES.—A JUDAISING CEREMONY THIS, WITHOUT PRECEPT OR EXAMPLE IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.—ITS GREAT INCONSISTENCY AND UNHAPPY TENDENCY POINTED OUT.—ITS ABOLITION, OR COMPLETE RENOVATION RECOMMENDED.

CLOSELY connected with the doctrines taught and believed in the Methodist connexion, stands a ceremonial in general practice among us at stated periods; this is distinguished by the title of "The renewal of the covenant."* The members of our societies are by no means unanimous in their opinions respecting either the general expediency of this ceremony, or the propriety of many of the expressions it contains. Many are of opinion that it bears the aspect of a Jewish institution, rather than that of a christian privilege; that it is a thing altogether un-

* Mr Wesley adopted this from the works of the Rev. Joseph Alleine, a pious minister in the west of England, of the 17th century. But Mr Alleine was not its author. A copy of the same covenant appears also in an old book, entitled "Turner's Remarkable Providences." But originate where it may in the christian church, it is evidently the offspring of a Judaising spirit, and is founded upon the Jewish covenant recorded by Moses in Deut. xxvi. 16. It has clearly no business in a church of Christ, though it is annually celebrated in most of the Methodist societies in the united kingdom.

authorised, and without precedent under the christian dispensation; and that in many parts its language is inimical to the genuine humility of the religion of Christ, and unbecoming sinful and dependent creatures, suing for mercy through the atoning blood of a crucified Saviour.

And indeed these sentiments are not to be wondered at, when we consider that by the terms of this covenant, the sinner is encouraged to pledge mighty promises of future holiness, zeal, and fidelity, and to stake solemn vows, having all the solemnity and obligation of oaths, of future stability, and the most perfect obedience to the law of God, as his part of the condition; in return for which promises, and upon the credit of which vows, he is taught to expect a most enlarged degree of the divine confidence and favour. Whereas, if the poor self-deceived creature, into whose mouth these promises and vows are put, and who takes upon him so solemn an obligation, knows any thing of his own heart, he must be sensible that it is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;"* and so far should he be from presuming to pledge the future fidelity and purity of that heart, to the all-seeing Majesty of heaven, as the condition of his acceptance, that he ought to be ready almost to shrink into hell itself to conceal, if possible, its horrible depravity from the sight of that God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity!

But let us not condemn the covenant unheard; let us examine its parts, and judge by its own ex-

* Jeremiah, xvii. 9.

pressions of the sentiments it is calculated to inspire*. Refer we, in the first place to the preamble; by this you see it is put into the mouths of the chief of sinners, of men and women who to that hour have been strangers to the covenant of grace, living without hope and without God in the world: it is evident this form of protestation was originally instituted for the use of such people, although in the Methodist societies it is indiscriminately applied to saints and sinners. But persons who, according to their own confession contained in this formule, have to that moment lived in open rebellion against God, who have never yet experienced the regenerating power of converting grace, these very persons are supposed, by the powerful influence of this solemn covenant, to be instantly transformed into most holy saints, and from that moment rendered capable of offering the most acceptable service to God, and tendering the most perfect and finished obedience to the divine law, as the foundation of their acceptance with their almighty judge! They are induced then to pledge the promises of that service and that obedience, as the conditions of their reconciliation with an offended deity, and taught to believe that those conditions are accepted of by God, and that from thenceforth they may take the liberty of reckoning themselves among the adopted children of the most high, and of laying claim to all the exalted privileges of those who, being actually born of

* The printed form may be had for about two pence, at any of the Methodist chapels in the kingdom.

God, are regenerated by the influence of his holy spirit and divine grace.

It will be evident to any impartial observer, that the preceding is a faithful delineation of the drift and design of that form adopted by us, as the mode of "renewing our covenant with God." There are, however, expressions contained in introductory and confessional parts of it which, if unconnected with the covenant itself, are unexceptionable and even excellent; and which, if suffered to have their full force upon our minds, would shew at once the absurdity and contradiction which appear in the engagements entered into in the body of the covenant. Our limits will not admit of copious extracts, but we shall notice one or two instances of this kind.

"There are two things which must necessarily be supposed in order to a sinner's coming to Christ. 1st. A deep sense of his sin and misery. 2d. An utter despair of himself, and all things else besides Christ."* And quite agreeable to this statement is the sentiment expressed in the latter part of the second clause of the covenant, "And because my own righteousness is but filthy rags, I renounce all confidence therein, and acknowledge that I am of

* But why is there no mention here made of the most essential thing "in order to a sinner's coming to Christ," and without which it is in fact impossible for him to come at all, viz. Faith in his blood and righteousness? Evidently because a substitute for this is found in the resolutions, promises, and vows of the sinner to convert himself, and to render a perfect obedience in future to the law of God! For this is not by any means a covenant of faith, but altogether a covenant of works.

myself a hopeless undone creature, without righteousness or strength." Very well so far, but how is this to comport with the language put into the mouth of this "miserable, hopeless, helpless sinner," in the very next paragraph, and without the slightest indication of the operation of faith, or of any work of regeneration taking place upon him? "I call heaven and earth to record this day, that I do here solemnly avouch thee for my God, and with all possible veneration bowing the neck of my soul under the feet of thy most sacred majesty, I do here take thee, the Lord Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for my portion, and do give up myself body and soul for thy servant, promising and vowing to serve thee in holiness and righteousness, all the days of my life!"

The irreconcilable contradiction of these two passages put at the same instant into the mouth of a sinner, though so evident and glaring, does not shock our minds, or agitate our feelings, so much as the arrogant self-sufficiency displayed in the latter, and the direful accumulation of guilt which the violation of these solemn vows must bring upon the consciences of those who rashly enter upon this awful engagement. For it is a melancholy reflection which our knowledge of human nature must here suggest to every enlightened mind, viz. that these rash and comprehensive vows are as uniformly broken as made. Alas, what is man!

Through the whole of this mongrel ceremonial, we find a strange contradiction of sentiment. In one part, one would suppose the genuine principles

of the gospel of Christ were about to be inculcated, and enforced in all their native truth and purity; but ere we are aware, we find ourselves again placed under the yoke of the law of Moses, and involved in that bondage, from which St Paul so strenuously laboured to emancipate the believers at Galatia. In it we see an attempt to intermix the terms and conditions of salvation under the Jewish and christian dispensations, which God hath completely and for ever separated; and to involve a helpless perishing sinner, living under the gracious dispensation of the gospel, in the bondage of a Jewish covenant, and thereby expose him to the curses attached to the breach of that covenant, by the abrogated law of Moses*.

* The abrogated law of Moses.—It is probable some of our Judaising Arminians will not much like this phrase; they are, however, referred to St Paul's authority for its truth and accuracy. With every possible degree of veneration and love for "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes us free from the law of sin and death," (See Rom. viii. 2.) we christians beg leave to plead our exemption from the curse attached to the breach of the law of Moses, and from all obligation to the observance of even the moral law (as promulgated from Mount Sinai,) as the condition of our acceptance with God, or the terms of our reconciliation to him. And we found this exemption on the express declaration of scripture, contained, first, in 2 Cor. iii. 6. 11. where even the moral law of the Jewish dispensation, viz. that "written and engraven on stones," by the finger of God; the decalogue itself, is declared to be "the ministration of death," and its legislative administration is there opposed to the evangelical spirit of the gospel; which, operating by mercy and grace, ministereth life to the perishing sinner under the New Testament dispensation. Whereas, the law, yea the moral law itself, is the minister of condemnation, and the mes-

That this is both the object and design of the covenant is evident, particularly from the fifth head of the introduction, where we find the following quotation from Deut. xxvi. 17. 18. "Thou has avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, to hearken to his voice. And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people as he hath promised thee." Again, it proceeds: "Observe it, the same day that they avouched the Lord to be their God, the same day, the Lord avouched them to be his peculiar people; the same day that they engage to keep the command-

senger of death to every transgressor. Hence its total abrogation as a medium of reconciliation to God, under the New Testament dispensation.

The abolition of the Old Testament covenant and every branch of it under the dispensation of the spirit, is further confirmed, in the second place, by the same inspired apostle in his epistle to the Hebrews, viii. 6.-13. where the violation and abrogation of the Old Testament covenant, is expressly avowed by the spirit of God, and the establishment of a new and a better covenant in its place is explicitly declared. By the gracious terms whereof, God, far from requiring obedience to his law as the previous condition of a sinner's acceptance with him, promises to his redeemed children the subjects of that covenant, that "he will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities he will remember no more." Now, the forgiveness of sins, and the fulfilment of the law, are very different and very opposite modes of restoration to the divine favour. God hath chosen the former, but the covenant which, to our shame and sorrow, the Methodists have adopted, distinctly and explicitly establishes the latter. Can this be justified, or ought it to be allowed? Certainly not. For it is a radical and effectual perversion of the gospel-plan of salvation; a renunciation of the evan-

ments of God, the same day the Lord engageth to keep his promise with them." And this is the foundation, these the terms, upon which this supposed christian covenant is erected. But every man possessing the slightest knowledge in theology, must perceive, if he has the candour to acknowledge it, that this is a direct and unequivocal recurrence to the abrogated law of works, as the medium of a sinner's restoration to the favour of God; and it has not even the modesty to rest its claim upon facts, upon works already performed, but it has the presumption to challenge the divine favour, upon the credit of mere promises, of works not yet performed, and which, in all probability, never will exist!

As if determined to overturn every branch of the precious "gospel of our salvation," and tear up by the roots those evangelical principles which are the glory of christianity, and ought to be the essence of

gelical principles of christianity, and a criminal recurrence to the abrogated terms of a Jewish covenant, which God himself declares to be null and void. And it is hard to say which is most conspicuous in this perversion, the impiety of opposing the order of God therein, or the evil which results to the church of God by thus casting a stumbling block in the way of a sinner who seeks his salvation through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. It is highly probable this is the grand and fundamental error which, like a canker-worm, is eating out the life and spirit of genuine piety from the Methodist societies in Ireland. Many of us are absolute Jews, with scarcely a spark of christianity either in our principles or our hearts! Can we then expect to prosper as a christian church till this old leaven is purged away? Our spirit is become so legal that we shrink from an evangelical truth, as though we were about to be bitten by a Calvinistic serpent!

Methodism, this covenant labours to establish the doctrine, that the self-created love and obedience of a sinner, is to be the sole-procuring cause of God's love to him; in direct opposition to the declaration of St John, that "we love him because he first loved us."* Let it also be most particularly remarked, that throughout this whole covenant, in which the eternal God is supposed to be one party, and a returning penitent sinner the other, there is not one word mentioned of the forgiveness of sins! It seems, the poor creature into whose mouth this is put, is so full of his promises of future obedience and his conditions of fulfilling the demands of the law; so busy in extolling the excellence of his future life, that he totally forgets to ask the forgiveness of his past sins! Or perhaps we wrong him; it may be that he does not think this by any means a necessary appendage to his salvation. Perhaps the super excellency of his promised righteousness will be quite sufficient to atone for all his past trangressions, and he will get his happy soul wafted to the mansions of celestial glory, upon the breath of one of these promises, without the painful and degrading ceremony of asking pardon for his past transgressions! Happy sinner! Miserable wretch; thy waxen wings will melt in the furnace of unquenchable fire, unless thou fly to the bosom of Jesus for mercy, and to his blood and righteousness for thy introduction to the favour of an avenging God!

My brethren, can we with criminal apathy stand

* 1 John, iv. 19.

by and see the most precious doctrines of the gospel sacrificed to the idol of self-righteousness? Can we deliberately assist in the destruction of the fundamental principles of our glorious dispensation? Certainly not. As christians, as men of God, as advocates for the truth as it is in Jesus, as ministers of the word of God, as stewards of the mysteries of salvation, we cannot, we dare not sacrifice the vital interests of our religion at the shrine of prejudice, or lay their demolished fragments at the feet of human authority. No: you will, with manly fortitude and christian integrity, maintain the genuine principles of your holy religion against authorised error, as well as incidental mistakes. Review then, with that candour and penetration for which many of you are justly celebrated, the terms of these "directions for renewing our covenant with God." See if you can conscientiously maintain their principles and enforce their practice as the medium of a sinner's admission into the favour of God, or as the ground of a believer's increase in the knowledge and love of his heavenly Father. To facilitate your decision, suffer a few more observations from one, whose zeal for the glory of Methodism, as the fairest representative of Christ and his apostles upon earth, has induced him to obtrude his thoughts upon the religious world.

The most striking circumstance in this ceremonial, is the glaring inconsistency, the strange absurdity of putting it indiscriminately into the mouths of saints and sinners. If it is calculated for the use of the one, it is impossible it can be adapted to the

case of the other. Would we confound all order in the church of God, destroy all rank in christian society, all degrees in spiritual attainments, and reduce the experience of a sanctified believer in Jesus, to a level with the weakness and depravity of "a half awakened child of man," a sinner just emerging from the darkness of hell, and not yet emancipated from the slavery of sin? If so, we shall find a powerful auxiliary in the language of this covenant! But if our reason forbids, and our piety prohibits this confusion of states, this amalgamation of christian experience, we shall take care to distinguish the saint from the sinner; and if we are wedded by an indissoluble attachment to the ceremonial of an annual covenant, let us at least exhibit some discriminating wisdom, by framing one for each distinct state in which our members may be found. But let these be formed by ourselves, and upon principles coincident with those doctrines which among us have proved themselves, by incontestible facts, to be indeed "the power of God unto salvation," and not upon the model of an abrogated Jewish ceremony.

But supposing we were to admit, for argument's sake (what however can never be proved,) that this ceremonial is not only justifiable but praise-worthy; we ask, where is the use of it for a child of God? It professes to be a medium of admission into the divine favour, and to possess a kind of secret key to the council-chamber of heaven; nay, it assumes a power to unlock the bosom of omnipotence, and place the returning sinner upon terms of the closest intimacy and union with his maker: now, suppos-

ing all this to be the truth, still what has a true-born child of God to do with this? He has previously found admission by "the new and living way into the holiest, by the blood of Christ," and is already rejoicing in a sin-pardoning God, with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Can you, or would you, persuade this man to trace back his steps to "the beggarly elements of earth," that he may have an opportunity of entering into life by this Jewish gate of empty promises and dead works? Do you not perceive that there is not a single sentence in the whole compass of this formule, adapted to the state of either a justified or a sanctified believer (except the ninth clause of the covenant itself, beginning, "And now glory be to thee," &c. which by the way the *sinner* has no kind of claim to?) But we charitably hope that justified and sanctified believers form the bulk of our societies; why then retain a form, and press its practice upon them, in which it is impossible for them to join without virtually denying the exalted privileges they already enjoy, and becoming suppliants for blessings they are already in complete possession of? What shall we call this? Is it any thing less than mocking God to his face, and most essentially grieving his holy spirit,—how is it consistent with either sincerity or truth?

But stronger objections yet remain. Admitting there are many things in the introductory parts, which may be exceedingly profitable to a man in a state of natural alienation from God, by reading which his judgment may be in some measure informed, his understanding enlightened, and his passions

and affections wrought upon, as a ground-work for future conversion (and to such a man it is addressed) yet both the covenant itself, the language in which it is clothed, and the conclusions drawn from it, are all totally inadmissible. God will now enter into neither treaty, nor personal covenant with a sinner; and it is the most arrogant presumption in him to expect it. In doing so he places himself upon a level with the Almighty, and pledges his wretched works as an adequate value for the inestimable riches of everlasting life. God hath indeed entered into "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure;"* but this was concluded with Jesus, the one mediator between God and man; and with no other individual of the human race, since his advent, will God enter into either treaty or covenant. This covenant rests, for its immoveable basis, upon the atoning blood and meritorious righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. By these the blessings of salvation are purchased for the whole human race, and are secured to every penitent be-

* 2 Samuel, xxiii. 5.—Psalms, lxxxix. 3. 27. 37.—Isaiah, lv. 3.-5.—In all which places, although the name of David is used, yet it is most certain that Jesus is intended, of whom David was an eminent and illustrious type, and from whom, according to the flesh, our Lord sprang. He is the sole mediator of the new and everlasting covenant, the only one which God will now sanction or admit. And we are certain he will be a party to no other. Our Covenanters, therefore, only lose their labour in endeavouring to persuade God to enter into a separate covenant with themselves, and they only deceive their own hearts in believing that he has done so. All our efforts to inspire him with confidence in our promises of future obedience are totally in vain and useless. He

liever, by both the promise and the oath of God*. Now the man who is not satisfied with this covenant, but goes about to establish another in his own individual person, with the everlasting God; and who presumes to lay the promises of his own righteousness as the foundation of that covenant, this man frustrates the grace of God as to himself, he virtually renounces the mediation of Christ, excludes himself from the blessings of the true covenant of mercy and peace; and rejects, as beneath his notice, the only terms on which God will admit him to the blessings of salvation!

The second, third, and seventh clauses of the covenant under consideration, fixes upon it, and upon those who make it the condition of their acceptance with God, with indelible certainty the preceding character. And although the language of the fourth and fifth clauses appears to indicate a renunciation of that righteousness which is promised and pledged as the condition of the covenant in the second, third, and seventh; and thereby tears the whole fabric in

knows us too well to be deceived by them! Penitent sinner, you may have an interest in the immaculate righteousness of his only begotten Son, with whom his covenant is established for ever, and this will give you a clear title to heaven, but God will never negociate a bargain of salvation with you upon the basis of your own righteousness. Get yourself united to Christ by a living faith, and your peace is at once made with God. He, your great head and representative, hath long since settled the terms of your salvation, and paid down the price in his own precious blood. The covenant of redemption was ratified and the door of salvation thrown open, ages before you came into existence!

* Hebrews, vi. 13. 18.

pieces: yet even that renunciation put thus into a sinner's mouth, is a mere matter of form, a promise, an empty profession, which he is in no ways able to perform, unless he is specially instructed, and powerfully inclined to do so, by the energetic influence of the spirit of God. Instead, therefore, of rashly undertaking to "marry himself to the king of glory, to accept of him for a head and husband, for better for worse, for richer for poorer;"* and promising (good creature, notwithstanding these variations in his Lord's character and circumstances!) "in all times and conditions, to love, honour, and obey him, even unto death," &c. Instead of making these pompous and arrogant professions, would it not be much more becoming in a "wretched, miserable, blind, naked, most loathsome, polluted wretch; and guilty, condemned malefactor," as this man has just professed himself to be, if he would humbly ask for grace, to enable him in some degree to worship and glorify God, through the merits of a crucified Saviour? Methinks this plan would be rather more congenial to the spirit of the gospel, abundantly more acceptable to God, and incomparably more suitable to the state of the wretched author of these professions.

Confiding, however, in the regenerating power of the covenant, and its prevailing influence with God, the man ventures, at last, to announce his own

* What then, is the Lord of life and glory expected to be sometimes good and sometimes bad, at one time rich and at another poor?

adoption into the family of heaven, and proclaims his participation in all the blessings of the children of God; informing the ever blessed God, in language which we shall not here repeat, that he is now become "his covenant friend," and desires the conditions and terms may be ratified, and the deed registered in heaven!

Thus we see the great work of a sinner's repentance, conversion, and complete sanctification, begun, carried on, and finished, in the space of fifteen or twenty minutes, and the whole transaction recorded and ratified in twenty-three pages of letter-press; not doubting but a counterpart of it is registered in the courts of heaven, there to rest among the archives of salvation, until the day of final retribution, when it is to be again produced. Heaven only knows with what sensations the majority of its makers will view it in that awful day: God grant it may not be to their everlasting shame and confusion! We charitably hope the tender mercy of God will rescue them from the direful effects of their rash engagement.

The concluding note as inserted at the end of this covenant, is of too interesting a nature to be passed over in silence; it is a most suitable epilogue to such a ceremony. "This covenant (says the writer of it,) I advise you to make, not only in heart but in word; not only in word, but in writing; and that you would, with all possible reverence, spread the writing before the Lord, as if you would present it to him as your act and deed; and when you have done this, set your hand to it; keep it as a memorial of the

solemn transactions which have passed between God and you, that you may have recourse to it in doubts and temptations."*

This is the climax of the covenant: it was before charged with the office of a mediator, to reconcile sinners to God.—it is now introduced into the character of a saviour, and invested with the sacred office of the spirit of God; it must save us from sin, and guard us against the influence of temptation! After this, is it needful to proceed a step farther? Yes: deep rooted prejudice is obstinate; it often presents a shield of adamant equally impervious to reason and revelation. Our regard for the interests of religion induces us to leave no means untried, to divest our friends of its pernicious influence. Let us reason then a little more, upon the general tendency of this adopted ceremony.

* The author of this work knows one man, who literally took this advice. He was under deep convictions for sin: unhappily this covenant fell in his way; instead of going with simple faith to the adorable Jesus to have his burthen removed, he struggled long with it in his own strength, and at length committed his cure to the covenant. He resolved, and re-resolved, "and bound himself by the most solemn promises" to keep the commandments of God. He entered into this very ceremony; he procured a copy of it, he signed and sealed it, and going into the fields he made a solemn tender of it to heaven, and then laid it by as directed. But Satan laughed both at him and his covenant. That subtle spirit well knew that God being a party to it was an idle conceit. The man now lives in the same town, where this is written, but he makes no kind of pretension to religion! How many other backsliders have the guilt of this ceremony on their heads? Probably thousands may thank it for their apostacy.

Conscious as we must be of the little confidence the best of us can place either in our resolutions or our promises, is it not extraordinary that we should venture, with so much assurance, to pledge their integrity to God,—do we really expect that God will believe us, when we cannot believe ourselves?—But what induces us to do this? A wish to impress our maker with a much better opinion of us, than we are conscious we justly deserve! And upon that opinion to rest our claim to an increase of the divine favour and approbation. So then, we have the double motive of soothing our own vanity, and imposing upon our maker! But do we not know that God is not mocked; that he cannot be cajoled out of his favours; that it is impossible to deceive him with empty promises, or amuse him with vain protestations*? Why then do we attempt it? "O (says an advocate for the covenant,) these solemn vows, though not strictly observed, must have some good effect upon the mind; they cannot all pass for nothing; some good impressions must inevitably remain from them." Alas, my friend, then you are for purchasing a little piety, at the expence of a great deal of perjury! Is this the religion you recommend from the pulpit, as the *foundation* of our acceptance with

* Perhaps it may be urged that these promises are sincere when made. Possibly they may be so; but our own experience teaches us their futility; and as such they are a rotten foundation, calculated to deceive our own souls, and to insult, rather than satisfy our God. They are besides absurd and ridiculous, for we know not that we shall live another moment, consequently we can have no authority to make promises for futurity.

God? But is there no holy spirit promised of God to "make good impressions upon the mind," that we are obliged to have recourse to promises and resolutions, vows and protestations, in the hope that one in twenty of these may survive the wreck of our unfaithfulness, and give us some title to the approbation of heaven? Do you intend to exhibit this as a true picture of modern Methodism?

But many a pious and upright soul, has been brought into the greatest distress of mind, by being induced to join in this ceremony. And no wonder; for out of the myriads who have entered into the engagements therein contained, it may be justly questioned if one single soul can be found that ever fulfilled them! Every one, therefore, who is blessed with a tender conscience, must feel inexpressible anguish at the reflection of their frequent breach.

Yet let it not be supposed that we wish to discourage the pursuit of christian holiness: far, very far from it; it is the rash and futile promises of this, made by persons whose unregenerated minds are incapable of performing them, that we wish to discourage, yea, to banish them for ever from our connexion; and more especially when these are pledged as the condition of their restoration to the divine favour. Genuine christian holiness is a thing we incessantly labour to establish in the hearts and lives of our people. But this is the offspring of previous reconciliation with God, through faith in his only begotten Son; and not the visionary creature of a heated imagination, offered as the condition of that reconciliation.

Upon the whole, this celebrated covenant appears to have been formed upon the model of that recorded in Deuteronomy, xxvi. 16. &c. and founded upon the Jewish principle of satisfying the demands of a *legislative deity*, by a strict obedience to the letter of the law. But it is impossible to press it into the service of the christian dispensation, without undermining the evangelical principles of the gospel; for that proceeds upon the principle that the demands of the law are already satisfied in the person and offices of the Son of God, through faith in whose blood and righteousness our acknowledged transgressions of that law are pardoned; and instead of attempting to satisfy the demands of a legislative God, we are called to receive the grace, mercy and love, of a redeeming God, who loved us, and gave his only begotten Son, to the end that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

But this covenant sets out upon the principle of self-conversion, and claims a reward upon the credit of perfect and unspotted obedience promised at a future day; a plea which is as insulting to God as it is vain and futile in itself. It cannot be for a moment recognised as legitimate, and we must for ever lament, with sentiments of the deepest regret, that it has been unhappily interwoven in the fabric of Methodism. Let us, however, indulge a hope that it may yet be banished from our societies, or at least completely new-modelled, and if possible rendered in some degree agreeable to our glorious and evangelical dispensation. Happily, a considerable num-

ber of our well-informed members are grown completely ashamed of it, and will by no means attend its annual celebration. In the name of God therefore, we say, let us have no covenant of reconciliation with God, but that one, "well ordered in all things, and sure;" which he himself hath established in the person and offices of his well-beloved Son, the foundation whereof is laid in his blood, and its fulfilment secured by his immaculate righteousness; to faith in which, and to that alone, God hath promised eternal salvation. It is most important to know (alas, that we have it yet to learn!) that all other covenants, terms, and conditions, are destructive of the principles of the gospel, dishonourable to the author of salvation, and attended with the most ruinous consequences to those who dare to place confidence in them.

CHAP. VIII.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE STATE OF METHODISM ASSOCIATED WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY.—LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE ASSERTED AND MAINTAINED IN THE METHODIST CONNEXION.—HOW FAR PREACHERS ARE CALLED UPON TO SURRENDER THEIR PRIVATE SENTIMENTS TO THE DECISION OF THE BODY.—COMPARATIVE SUCCESS AND PROSPERITY OF METHODISM IN ENGLAND, AND DECLENSION IN IRELAND NOTICED.—SOME CAUSES OF THIS TRACED OUT.—CO-OPERATION WITH THE EVIDENT DESIGNS OF PROVIDENCE RECOMMENDED.—THE NECESSITY OF COMPILING A COMPENDIUM OF DOCTRINES AND DISCIPLINE POINTED OUT.—THE OUTLINES OF THESE DELINEATED, AND THEIR ADOPTION RECOMMENDED.

It must be admitted, that the Methodists, particularly in England, are rapidly rising into that respectable rank in society, and that consideration and importance in the religious world, to which the purity of their principles, the general soundness of their doctrines, the depth of their piety, and excellence of their morals, so justly entitle them. Their preachers have been blessed with a degree of success proportioned to their extraordinary zeal and indefatigable labours. Their societies have sprang up in every corner of the empire, and intermixed with every class of civil society And although it must be confessed, that as it was in the days of St Paul,

"Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called,"* or choose to accept of the salvation of their souls, through the simple medium of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as taught in the oracles of God, and now promulgated from the pulpits of Methodism; yet some even among the great, the noble, and the learned, are stooping from the pride of station, and the refinements of philosophy, to embrace that gospel, whose simplicity and truth are ordained to be the source of salvation to the fallen sons of Adam. Of these some have even ventured to despise the contempt of a proud and disdainful world, and have manifested their superior wisdom and genuine piety, by assuming the name as well as the principles of a Methodist. Convinced that the power of God is eminently displayed in the conversion and salvation of souls among these formerly despised people, they have nobly sacrificed a portion of their terrestrial reputation, for the more exalted privileges of the children of God; while multitudes of occasional hearers, who fill the ranks of our immense congregations, though not incorporated with our societies, testify their approbation of our doctrines, and sooner or later may, by the blessing of God, come to the experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, through the medium of the Methodist connexion.

Emerged from the state of infantile imbecility, and degrading dependence on other religious establishments, in which the timid and cautious policy of

* i Cor. i. 26.

its first founders had placed it, Methodism, in England, has assumed that commanding aspect, and dignified rank in the church of God, to which it is so well entitled. And although in Ireland a weak and crouching policy has kept it to this day in its leading-strings, and it is still in the hands of the nurse; yet we look forward with confidence to the approaching period when the wisdom and resolution of its leading members will co-operate with the designs of an unerring providence, in asserting the glorious privileges, which as a branch of the true church of Christ, it has an unquestionable right to enjoy. God, who can be at no loss for means and instruments wherewith to accomplish his gracious designs, will, doubtless raise up men whose superior talents and enlightened minds mark them out as proper agents in the work of reformation and improvement; these men, uniting prudence with christian fortitude, will break the ice of prejudice, and lead the Methodists of Ireland into the enjoyments of privileges and comforts to which they are now complete strangers, and we trust, will open a way for a far more extensive and successful propagation of the glad tidings of salvation in this part of the united kingdom.

Anticipating the arrival of this happy period, the present writer ventures to propose the outlines of that reformation, and lay a foundation for that improvement, which, if approved and adopted, he trusts may under the blessing of a gracious providence, and by the united wisdom of the leading men of the connexion, happily contribute to the attainment of an

increase of piety and consequent prosperity of which we have hitherto seen no example in Ireland.

To do this with the greater effect, it will be necessary to take a closer view of the fabric of Methodism than we have hitherto done, that we may have the better opportunity of approving the things which are excellent in the connexion, while we suggest alterations or improvements where the exigencies of the establishment appear to require them.

In the preceding parts of this work we have discussed some important points in doctrine, which remain for the consideration of both preachers and people; but still we appear to be at a loss for an official tribunal, to which the decision of doctrinal controversies may be referred, nor is the degree of responsibility which attaches to a preacher's sentiments, yet fully or clearly ascertained. For although the conference is certainly invested with a power to take cognizance of deviations from what are supposed to be the sound and orthodox principles of Methodism in the members of their own body, yet the want of a select committee officially appropriated to that purpose, as well as in many cases of an authorised criterion of judgment, respecting particular points of doctrine, renders that judgment often inefficient and undecisive. For in our present state, a question may be referred to the conference, upon which there may be a diversity of opinion among the preachers themselves who constitute that body, and who are not bound to unanimity by any certain or well-defined criterion. And in fact it is well known (instances of which we have already adduced)

that a diversity of sentiment does exist among the preachers, respecting some very important, if not essential points of doctrine*.

There is but one condition specified as indispensably necessary to the admission of a private member into the Methodist society, that is "a desire to flee from the wrath to come," to be saved from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin; which desire is expected to be manifested by an adherence to the practical rules which constitute the basis of the connexion, and these pre-suppose a general ac-

* It is both interesting and important here to refer to the minutes of the First Conference, held in June 1744, where we find the ground of private judgment distinctly laid down as the unalienable privilege of every christian; and, at the same time, the boundaries are ascertained at which a surrender of that judgment is required from a Methodist preacher. These fundamental principles being coeval with the preacher's character as a christian, and his admission as a minister of the gospel in the Methodist connexion, are in full force at the present day, and must continue so to the end of time. These, therefore, must form the basis of all future regulations, respecting the belief and propagation of doctrines in the Methodist societies. They run thus :—

"*Question.* How far does each of us agree to submit to the judgment of the majority?—*Answer.* In speculative things each can only submit so far as his judgment shall be convinced. In every practical point, each will submit so far as he can without wounding his conscience.

"*Question.* Can a christian submit any farther than this to any man, or number of men upon earth.—*Answer.* It is undeniably certain he cannot, either to Bishop, Convocation, or General Council. And this is that grand principle of private judgment on which all the reformers proceeded, "Every man must judge for himself, because every man must give an account of himself to God." It

quiesence in the fundamental doctrines of christianity as propagated in that connexion. But exclusive of these, there is no particular restraint laid upon the consciences of the individual members, respecting points of doctrine. Indeed, external morality is sufficient to enable a man to maintain his rank as a member in the Methodist society, although he will not be highly esteemed unless his heart is deeply affected with the truths of religion, his mind enriched with the graces of the holy spirit, and his whole life an ornament to his christian profession.

But the case is different with a preacher of the gospel: in addition to the qualifications requisite to constitute an estimable member of the society, it is required that a preacher shall be sound in his principles, and orthodox in his doctrines. Hence, at the period of his admission, he is closely examined by the president of the conference touching his own conversion, his experience and knowledge in the fundamental truths of the gospel; and his assent to the leading doctrines of Methodism, as these are developed in the writings of Mr Wesley, is required. The best criterion of these is supposed to be "The Notes on the New Testament," "Six Volumes of Sermons," and the doctrinal parts of the various Minutes of Conference. This mode of proceeding is evidently the result of wisdom; it is sanctioned by experience, and is excellent as far as it goes; but still it is

is impossible to read this without admiring it; let it never be forgotten that these principles formed the basis of the Methodist Conference.

not productive of perfect unanimity of sentiment among the preachers. The reason of this is, the *principia* which form the basis of this intended coincidence are themselves, in some degree, vague and indefinite, and consequently liable to various interpretations. Hence the fluctuation of principle, and discordance of sentiment upon many important points of doctrine in the connexion.

Yet it must be confessed that unanimity of sentiment, particularly among the preachers, and especially upon subjects intimately connected with the vital interests of christianity, and consequently essential to the permanency, as well as the prosperity of the Methodist connexion, is a matter of the utmost importance, for upon this point may be suspended the very existence of the body. Discordance of sentiment may readily produce disunion, and this may lead to final separation, and ultimate destruction. We cannot, therefore, be too cautious in guarding against the possibility of discordance, or too minute in our endeavours to secure a perfect uniformity of principle and unanimity of sentiment throughout the entire body, both of preachers and people.

We have the ground-work of this already in our hands. In the enlightened productions of the venerable founders of Methodism, we have the fundamental principles of the gospel, not indeed free from all the defects incident to human compositions, but containing those great and important truths, which, when purged from the stains of prejudice, and the errors of misconception, are able to make us

"wise unto salvation." We have unquestionably much of the "pure gold of the sanctuary," though evidently alloyed with some dross from the imbecilities, if not the corruptions of human nature. And for discipline, we have the masterly arrangements of our most venerable founder, matured and improved by the experience of above half a century. But though we rejoice, with reverence and gratitude to the great author of all our blessings, in the enjoyment of these inestimable privileges, we must not suppose we have yet attained the acmé of perfection, or that either our doctrines, our discipline, or our worship, are not susceptible of improvement. Doubtless the men selected by the wisdom of providence to lay the foundation of the Methodist connexion, were eminently qualified for that important work; they were wise men in their day and generation, they were great and good men; yet neither wisdom nor piety died with them: their talents however great, however splendid, were the gift of God, and the great head of the church in whose hands the disposal of those gifts remains, feels the same interest in the prosperity of that church at the present moment that he ever did.

Methodism, although inheriting the divine blessing, and evidently the offspring of a co-operating providence, is nevertheless a human institution, and the agents employed in its establishment were men of like passions with ourselves, and encompassed with the infirmities inseparable from humanity.—Every one knows that Mr John Wesley had his prejudices and his partialities; many of these, indeed,

he was compelled to abandon during his long and useful life, others he retained to his dying day; and his brother Charles, with the most evangelical principles, united a zealous, and almost intolerant bigotry to the church establishment. But neither of these eminent men, no, nor all the conferences at which they assisted or presided, had any power to enact laws, to establish principles, or institute regulations, binding upon their successors, or their posterity. Our acquiescence in these is a matter of choice, and not compulsion; and we possess the unquestionable power of revising, altering, or abolishing any part of our religious establishment.

Great and extraordinary excellency undoubtedly characterises the entire fabric of Methodism; the symmetry of every part is admirable, while the whole bears the legitimate stamp of genuine wisdom and true piety. Its noble simplicity, productive of such distinguished stability, does equal honour to the understanding and piety of its original founders; while the success which has hitherto attended its propagation, marks the zeal of their successors, and strongly indicates the blessing of omnipotence. Yet it is certain that no human institutions ever attain to absolute perfection: but there is in every well-conducted establishment a gradual progression to that desirable point; and this opens a field for the exercise of talent, and the improvement of intellect. The design of God appears to coincide with a progressive advance towards perfection. Both in the economy of providence, and in the dispensations of grace; in the natural as in the moral world, the plans of omnipo-

tence itself are gradually developed, and slowly matured. In the prosperity of the church, and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, the wisdom and love of God, and the comprehensive designs of his grace, like the blossoms of nature, gradually unfold their precious foliage, and gently obtrude their matchless blessings on the human heart; while our intellectual powers are lost in the attempt to trace the unerring wisdom which directs their benevolent course, or to fathom the ocean of love which originally gave them birth.

But in every age of the church the providence of the God of nature, co-operating with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, both raises up, and conducts into his church, men whose peculiar talents and superior abilities, if fully brought into action, and faithfully used, are calculated to fill those important stations for which they are evidently designed; and it is both our duty and our wisdom, to guard against the influence of bigotry or prejudice on the one hand, while we exercise christian prudence and becoming caution on the other. If we follow the leadings of providence with a cautious simplicity and upright sincerity, we shall see those results which will justify an implicit confidence in the wisdom and power which has undertaken to cause "all things to work together for good to them that love God."*

As the designs of providence unfold themselves to our view, we discover in them a beauty and divine consistency which were at first imperceptible

* Romans, viii. 28.

to our limited conceptions; but when fully accomplished, the retrospect furnishes the most ample display of consummate wisdom. and unfathomable goodness. These excite our admiration, and demand our just tribute of praise and adoration. Thus we see that Moses was selected to be the legislator of Israel in the wilderness, and the guide to conduct them to the boundaries of the promised land: but Joshua was destined by providence to carry them over Jordan. These transactions, and their illustrious agents were eminent types of the legal and evangelical dispensations. The law represented by Moses, drives the condemned sinner to the threshold of mercy, but it is the gospel and its divine author, represented by Joshua, that introduces him into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, and "gives him an inheritance among them that are sanctified, by faith in Jesus Christ."*

Tracing this principle through the course of christianity, we perceive the interposing hand of a gracious providence in supplying the churches with pastors and guides suited to the particular circumstances of the times in which they have lived, and wisely calculated to promote the advancing interests of religion in every age and country. So the extraordinary talents of a Wesley and a Fletcher appear to have been admirably adapted to the primitive establishment of the Methodist societies, and these "burning and shining lights," having "served their own generation by the will of God, fell on

* Acts. xxvi. 18.

sleep, and were laid unto their fathers." The writings of these enlightened ambassadors of God, next to those of the inspired authors, constitute the pillars of Methodism, and will deservedly form the basis of our doctrines and discipline to the end of time; with which, in all probability, this connexion will be commensurate.

But it was not their province to provide against the future exigencies of the connexion, arising out of circumstances apparently contingent, and which it was equally impossible for them to foresee or prevent. That power, the great head of the church hath reserved in his own hand, and to him it appertaineth to appoint those agents whom his wisdom selects as the instruments of carrying his designs into execution But a short period had elapsed from the death of Mr Wesley, when many of the leading members of the Methodist societies in England, saw and felt the necessity of taking a step in direct opposition to the original design and avowed sentiments of that great and good man. The preachers also concurred in the innovation, and in a short time the administration of the sacraments of baptism, and the supper of the Lord took place in the connexion: the worship of the Methodists rivalling that of the established church in point of real excellency, and commencing at the same hours, a separation took place, which Mr Wesley could never contemplate without emotions of grief, or mention but in terms of the strongest reprobation.

The subsequent prosperity of the Methodist societies in England, demonstrate that this important al-

teration was not effected without the approbation of him, to the sway of whose sceptre the kingdoms both of nature and of grace must yield an implicit obedience; the great head of the church, "who is over all, God blessed for ever;" * whose power no creature is able to resist, and before whose high authority principalities and powers, kings and popes, councils and conclaves, shrink into nothing, and hide their diminished heads; like the fugitive meteors of the chilly night, when Aurora proclaims the welcome approach of the luminary of the day!

But while prosperity marks the progress of Methodism in England, and almost unlimited success accompanies the labours of its preachers in that favoured part of the British empire, it languishes and pines in Ireland, as though it there laboured under the destructive influence of a mortal disease†. Without pretending to trace the latent causes of this state of things through all their secret ramifications, or to develope all the symptoms of declension which press upon us on every side, we will for the present confine our observations to the doctrines promulgated from our pulpits, and embraced by our people. That these have in many cases deviated very considerably both from the oracles of inspiration, and from the original principles of primitive Methodism, is a fact which cannot be questioned. Undeniable proof of this can be adduced in abundance, and some instan-

* Romans, ix. 5.

† We trust that although the pure and undefiled religion of the gospel is in a languishing state among us, we cannot generally

ces of it are already given in this work; but the subject is painful to dwell upon, let us rather, if it be practicable, seek for an effectual and permanent remedy.

However unreasonable it may be to lay restraint upon the consciences of individuals, and to dictate to them what they must believe, upon pain of excommunication, death, or even damnation *; yet,

adopt the language of the following verses, from one of Mr Wesley's Confessional Hymns. Their application, however, to great numbers in our societies, is but too just and well-founded.

"God, of unspotted purity!
Us and our works canst thou behold?
Justly we are abhorred by thee,
For we are neither hot nor cold.

"We call thee Lord, thy faith profess,
But do not from our hearts obey;
In soft Laodicean ease
We sleep our useless lives away.

"We live in pleasure, and are dead;
In search of fame and wealth we live;
Commanded in thy steps to tread,
We seek sometimes, but never strive.

"A lifeless form we still retain,
Of this we make our empty boast;
Nor know the name we take in vain,
The power of Godliness is lost!"

* This is the infamous and unjustifiable practice of the church of Rome! Liberty of conscience is totally unknown in that oppressive and persecuting church; yet Protestants are found to ad-

when a man presents himself as a candidate for the office of a minister, in a particular congregation or society of christians, it is both just and proper that he should embrace and undertake to preach such doctrines, and such only as are essentially conformable to the known principles of that congregation or society. If he does not this, he must either act the

vocate her cause! The following extracts, the first from a tract entitled, *The Character of a Methodist;* the second from an *Advice to the People called Methodists* (both from the pen of Mr Wesley,) will illustrate our sentiments on this subject.

"The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or of another, are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever, therefore, imagines that a Methodist is a man of such or such an opinion, is grosly ignorant of the whole affair; he mistakes the truth totally. We believe, indeed, that all scripture is given by inspiration of God; and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels. We believe this written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish church. We believe Christ to be the eternal supreme God, and herein are we distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of christianity, *we think* and *let think*. So that whatsoever they are, whether right or wrong, they are no distinguishing marks of a Methodist."

"By Methodists I mean, a people who profess to pursue (in whatsoever measure they have attained,) holiness of heart and life, inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God: who place religion in an uniform resemblance of the great object of it, in a steady imitation of him they worship, in all his imitable perfections; more particularly, in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart, and governing the life."

part of a hypocrite, or otherwise produce schisms, and sow dissensions among the people to whom he is attached. In conformity to this principle, we find that there is a kind of compact existing in every christian society or community, whereby the ministers of each establishment are bound to adhere to the doctrines which form the religious basis of such society. These are generally reduced into a compact form, consisting of a comprehensive summary of the articles of faith, the rules of practice, and forms of devotion, in general use among that particular body of christians*. These constitute the standard of principle, the criterion of doctrine, and the regulation of discipline in the churches wherein they exist.

If there is a radical defect in the constitution of Methodism, perhaps it consists in the want of this very thing among us. It is true we take the Bible for the standard of our doctrines, and we do well: but the doctrines of the Bible are liable to a great variety of interpretations, and out of this variety has originated all the diversity of sentiment which now divides the christian world. What is the grand object of all the polemical divinity extant among us, of all the sermons and religious essays with which we abound, but to endeavour to give decision of character to the doctrines deduced from scripture, and

* Such are the creeds, catechisms, &c. of the churches of Rome and England; the Thirty-nine Articles, Rubricks, Canons, and Liturgy of the latter; the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Catechisms among Dissenters; and Barclay's Apology with the Quakers, &c.

to fix the meaning of controverted passages according to our opinions of orthodoxy? We are not about to question the propriety of this, on the contrary, it is an essential branch of our duty; but the defect lies in the scattered and confused state in which our doctrines lie, and in the indecision of their character when they are found. If I am pressed upon a point of doctrine which I want to defend from the writings of either Mr Wesley or Mr Fletcher, I commence my search for the controverted subject on the morning of the sabbath day; I think myself happy if with the assistance of a tolerable memory, I can trace it out before night. Thus a day is spent in doing what, with a little arrangement, might be easily accomplished in a few minutes.

But this is not all; after finding my authority, and citing it in all the confidence of conscious victory, my antagonist coolly tells me, "Mr Wesley acknowledged he sometimes leaned too much towards Calvinism, I will find you a place where all that doctrine is torn up by the roots!" And here my argument is laid at rest.

Is it not evident then that we want an official compendium of our doctrines, compiled from the voluminous writings wherein they now lie scattered, and bearing the stamp of legitimate authority? Yes, we want this exceedingly, and the pressing necessity for it is daily increasing. We want it, in the first place, to fix our own principles, which on many important points are vague and uncertain. We want it, secondly, to put all our people, as well as preachers, in possession of these principles, that they may

both understand and be prepared to vindicate them with modest firmness, against the slander of our enemies, or the mistakes of our friends. We want it, in the third place, as a centre of union, a rallying point of defence and mutual support, round which the whole body of the connexion can form a circle of unanimity, whose ranks cannot be easily penetrated by error, or broken by disunion. In short we want it as the key-stone in the arch of the fabric of Methodism, and without it we shall find parts of our building continually falling about our ears, and threatening both the foundation and superstructure with ruin and desolation.

As to the character of this work, it is evident that it should be a complete digest, a perfect pandect of our principles, the authorised standard of our doctrines, the guide of our practice, and the director of our discipline. It should support the character, and perhaps might advantageously bear the designation of "The Code of Methodism." It ought probably to be divided into two parts, the first of which should comprehend, in an abridged form, every point of doctrine which, as Methodists, we are supposed to maintain. This should be compressed into the narrowest possible compass, and arranged with judgment and regularity, with an alphabetical index. It should also contain references to the authorities upon which those doctrines rest, and the sources from whence they are drawn.

As Methodism has now received the benefit of upwards of eighty years' experience, during which the united wisdom of its very able advocates and

ministers have incessantly laboured for its improvement and success, the present generation can be at no loss for the means of ascertaining what ought to constitute the fundamental principles, or the permanent doctrines of our connexion.

The second part should consist of a collection of all our rules of discipline, as established by various Minutes of Conference, including the regulations which have been adopted respecting the appointment of stewards, leaders, local and travelling preachers, arranged under distinct heads; the modes and times of public worship, with the management and disposal of the funds of the connexion; and the power of the conference itself, and of the committees selected for different purposes, should be distinctly laid down and ascertained *. In short, this work should faithfully delineate the genuine features of Methodism in all its branches, presenting both to every member of the society (into whose hands it ought to be put,) as well as to the public at large, a correct, though concise view, of the nature of our whole establishment, that every man may know what he is invited to embrace, when solicited to join the Methodist connexion.

The preparation of a work of this kind would un-

* It would be highly desirable that as far as it is by any means practible, there should be both an unanimity of principle, and an uniformity of practice in all things, throughout the entire connexion. The benefits resulting from the superior wisdom and masterly arrangements of the English branch, should be extended to Ireland. Why should this country be treated as an OUTCAST, or her sons as aliens from the commonwealth of our spiritual Israel ?

doubtedly call for some of the first talents in the connexion, and some labour and patience would be requisite for its accomplishment; but thank God we could be at no loss for these. His gracious providence has given us men of superior abilities, who think no labour too great to promote the prosperity of the connexion, and to secure the present and eternal welfare of its members. As unanimity of sentiment, in religious bodies, is the soul of mutual affection, and the proper cement of peace and concord, it would be desirable to see the whole body of the connexion, in every part of the united kingdom, coinciding and co-operating in a work of this description. Delegates from the Irish conference might meet those appointed by the British, and frame the grand outlines of the work, subject to the revision, alteration, and improvement of the general conferences of each. In two years it might be completed; during which period the members of the committees appointed to prepare it, would have time and opportunity to make their extracts and arrangements individually, and by meeting one week before the conference, could be prepared to lay their united efforts before that body.

The benefits which would result to the connexion from a work of this kind, if ably executed, properly authenticated, and disseminated over the empire, are incalculable, and they are too obvious to require a particular enumeration. We may however just observe, that it would give a decisive *character* to the connexion which it has not at present. By fixing our principles, and defining our doctrines, it

would enable every member at once to understand, and render him competent to defend those principles and doctrines from the attacks of ignorance, and the abuse of impiety; and likewise to satisfy both his own conscience, and that of his inquiring friend, concerning the reasons which induced him to embrace the principles, and join the society of Methodists: it would, moreover, prove a happy source of unanimity among ourselves, and be the means, in the hand of God, of securing the peace and harmony of the whole connexion, to the remotest ages of posterity. By silencing the clamours of ignorance and impiety, and depriving prejudice of its most formidable supports in these auxiliaries, a way would be opened for the more effectual display of our principles to the candid and ingenuous of every denomination; who, duly appreciating their real excellency when viewed through the medium of truth, would be the more readily inclined to embrace them, and thus we might indulge a well-grounded hope of a more rapid and extensive spread of pure and undefiled religion, by our instrumentality, through the nations of which we make a part.

As we cannot at present anticipate any well-founded objection that could be urged against the adoption of the plan under consideration, we shall here take the liberty to suggest some of the most important subjects which appear necessary to form the general features of the work, at the same time observing that, upon every point, a positive and distinct decision should be fixed. Here should be no "*Genesis Problematica*," no mere hypothesis; but per-

manent and well-founded principle should characterise every branch of our doctrines, as far as unprejudiced reason, founded on express revelation, renders this practicable.

A compendium of these doctrines, calculated to answer the important ends designed, would embrace and develope our belief respecting, 1st, the fundamental principles of all religion: 2d, the leading doctrines of christianity: and 3d, our peculiar sentiments upon non-essential points as Methodists. For instance:

In the first place, concerning the essential attributes of the deity, particularly his wisdom, justice, truth, and love *, with the operations and influences of these upon the persons and interests of mankind, as displayed in the various dispensations of providence and grace.

* These with his omnipotence, omniscience, and ubiquity, appear to constitute all that is revealed to us respecting the divine nature: for goodness is the general character of the deity, and marks the ineffable perfection of his nature. It is true, mercy is frequently styled "God's darling attribute;" but this appears to be rather the exercise of his love towards his rational offspring, in the peculiar circumstances of their guilt and misery, than a distinct and primary attribute of the godhead. Guilt and misery are the only circumstances which can render creatures the objects of mercy; and therefore that display and exercise of the divine goodness, which we distinguish by this name, could not have emanated from the deity, had not these evils previously existed. Mercy is the operation of love, in pardoning, counteracting, and abolishing these evils. But it would be saying little for the glory of the divine attributes, were we to suppose their operation was bounded by the bare removal of evil. The justice of God being satisfied for the sins of

2. Of the scriptural doctrine of a trinity of persons in the unity of the godhead: with our belief respecting the person and offices of the Lord Jesus Christ, distinguishing the glory of his divine, from the imbecilities of his human nature; but placing the transcendent dignity of the latter as sustaining and reflecting the image of deity, in its true scriptural, and highly exalted rank in creation.

3. Of the original state of man: wherein consisted his original state of perfection and glory, indicated by the Mosaic account of his creation in the image of God; the terms and conditions on which the permanency of his felicity was suspended; the means by which he fell; and the extent of the injury he sustained by such fall.

4. The effects of that fall upon his posterity accurately defined: with an illustration of the divine wisdom and goodness in permitting that fall, and suffering the propagation of the human race under

the world by the death of Christ, his wisdom and goodness have provided, in the glorious plan of redemption, an incomparably greater felicity, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" for the objects of that redemption, than they could have been entitled to, or qualified to enjoy, had they never been the subjects of guilt and misery. Herein is displayed the transcendent riches of that grace which consummates the felicity of the saints; and here we at once admire and adore the unsearchable wisdom of that counsel which produces, out of the greatest possible evils, the highest good to the fallen sons of men, who embrace the boundless mercy of God by faith in Jesus Christ. All the attributes of God are equally dear to him, but they all unite their sacred energy in subservience to his love. By this precious attribute God hath condescended to designate the glorious perfection of his own nature. The spirit of truth testifies by St John that "God is love!"

its distressing effects, and subject to its inevitable consequences.

5. Of the nature, extent, and general efficacy of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.—How far does the influence of this extend to mankind; first, in their initial state of formation and infancy; and secondly, in their adult and responsible states under the various dispensations of grace? Is there any scriptural ground for the opinion that the sacred efficacy of that atonement will ultimately extend to the whole human race; and actually, as well as virtually, redeem every soul of man from the bitter pains of eternal death? Or are its benign effects limited in their application to the present state of existence, and finally consummated only in true believers, and those heathens who are the subjects of grace upon earth? And finally; was that atonement indispensably necessary as the foundation of our acceptance with God; or might he, consistently with the glorious perfections of his nature, have extended mercy to the human race, without that or any other satisfaction made to his justice *?

6. Of repentance towards God; its nature, and the source from whence it flows; its constituent

* A decisive answer to the latter part of this proposition appears to be absolutely necessary, as it forms an essential point in the principles of our holy religion; and there are various opinions respecting it in the connexion. The author has heard from a Methodist pulpit, the doctrine inculcated that the death of Christ was not essential to the salvation of mankind, but that God made choice of that as the most eligible and advantageous mode of reconciling the world unto himself. And he has been told by another preacher, and one of very distinguished rank and eminence in the connexion,

parts, and decisive tokens; its genuine fruits, and the means by which it is to be obtained.

7. Of justification unto eternal life.—What is the true nature of this inestimable blessing? Is it perfectly synonymous with the pardon of sin, or does it rise a step higher into the scale of christian privileges? In the period of its attainment, is it simultaneous with pardon, or subsequent to it? And, if a distinct blessing, what are its distinguishing marks?

8. Are we at liberty to suppose that righteousness of any description inward or outward, or holiness in any degree, are requisite in a penitent sinner, to be by him performed as the condition of his acceptance with God? Or may a miserable, helpless, condemned sinner, confessing the total corruption and depravity of his heart and life; acknowledging his utter inability to do any thing to recommend himself to the divine favour; and casting himself unconditionally upon the mercy of God, through the merits of his Redeemer,—may this man indulge a well-founded hope of "obtaining mercy and finding grace to help in time of need*?

9. Of genuine faith in Christ.—What is the precise character of that living principle of faith which

that "the death of Christ was not a meritorious sacrifice for the sins of the world," which was a Calvinistic notion; that God chose indeed to manifest his grace and extend his mercy to man through that medium; but that if it had so pleased him, he might have done the same through the death of a bullock, or any similar medium." This question therefore demands a fair discussion, and a final decision.

* The author conceives this to be a most important point, and one which deserves most serious consideration; for notwithstanding

produces the pardon of sin, is the medium of access to God, the instrument of salvation, through which its possessor overcomes the world, the flesh, and the devil? From whence is this derived, how is it to be obtained, and what are its objects, and its mode of operation? Is there a real, or only an imaginary difference between what we term "justifying faith," and "the true christian faith?"

10. Of regeneration.—What is the precise nature of this important branch of the christian religion? Is it an instantaneous transaction; a momentary or a progressive work? Can a man render God any acceptable service before he experiences this change? What are the certain tokens, and uniform effects of the new birth?

11. Is a true believer interested in the personal righteousness of Jesus Christ? Is this imputed to him for his justification? Is it the sole meritorious cause of his justification, or do his repentance and

the plausible aspect of those arguments, which, founded on God's well-known hatred to sin, and love of holiness, are often urged to induce a sinner to attempt his restoration to the divine favour by a reformation of his life; yet there certainly is a danger and not a slight one, in thus driving a man to "the deeds of the law" in the first instance, as the medium of his reconciliation to God. A practice which, though unhappily common in the Methodist societies, it is to be feared is destructive of the evangelical principles inculcated in the gospel of our salvation. Is not this the high road to Pharisaism, if it be not the essence of the thing itself? Probably our departure from our original principles in this very point, is a fundamental cause of the few genuine conversions which now mark the progress of Methodism.

If we recur to the Minutes of Conference for 1747, we shall perceive that Mr Wesley then saw, lamented, and laboured to

faith constitute a part of that cause? Does the reward of eternal life repose upon the imputed righteousness of Christ for its foundation; or does the personal righteousness of each believer form a part of its basis?

12. Of perfect holiness.—Wherein does this consist? In the entire eradication of sin, and sinful desires from the soul; or in the destruction of their power only? What are the scriptural proofs of this doctrine? Is it the common privilege of every child of God, or only of a favoured few? What are the means of attaining it; is it an instantaneous or a gradual work? Is it exclusively the work of the spirit of God, or does man take any, and what part in it? Is it absolutely necessary to salvation?

13. Of election to everlasting life.—Do we believe there is such a thing as the absolute unconditional election of certain individuals to life eternal? Mr Wesley, in his attempt to reconcile his principles to

counteract the increasing prevalence of this evil in the Methodist societies. He then saw the necessity of "emptying men of their own righteousness," in order to their being filled with that of Christ, and of "overturning all other foundations" preparatory to their "building upon Christ alone." Yet with heart-felt sorrow we express our apprehensions that, in 1770, Mr Wesley so far yielded to the torrent of prejudice which appears to have then overflowed the Methodist connexion, as to publish in the minutes of conference for that year, sentiments decidedly opposed to those just cited, as the resolutions of the same venerable body in 1747. If this is the fact, we yet cherish a hope that the present or a future generation of Methodists, will have the candour to confess the error, and the courage and integrity to resort again to those discarded principles, which God so eminently acknowledged at the commencement of the connexion.

those of Mr Whitefield, would not deny this point; he more than half admitted it to be true; what shall we say to it *?

14. Of the perseverance of the saints.—Is the Calvinistic notion of the infallible perseverance of every child of God, and his consequent certainty of salvation, founded on scriptural authority? This of course we deny; let us shew our reasons for doing so. We believe them corroborated by melancholy facts; but are there any exempt cases? Are there any individuals "thence eminently styled the elect," of whom it may be said, they "cannot finally fall away?" †

15. Of the resurrection of the dead.—What is our belief concerning this? Will it be literally accomplished in all mankind, in the ungodly as well as in the righteous? Will it be simultaneous in each?

* His words are: "I do not deny, though I cannot prove it is so, that God has unconditionally elected some persons to eternal glory." *(Whitehead's Life of Wesley, Dub. Ed. Vol.* II. p. 168.*)* And again, respecting irresistible grace, he says: "I do not deny that in some souls the grace of God is so far irresistible, that they cannot but believe, and be finally saved" (*ibid.*) This is indeed carrying irresistible grace quite far enough, no Calvinist will desire it to go one step farther. But the question is: Might a modern Methodist venture to follow Mr Wesley so far, without incurring the censure of his brethren, as a man of unsound principle? And if not, where is our present standard of orthodoxy?

† So Mr Wesley thought. On this subject he says: "I am inclined to believe that there is a state attainable in this life, from which a man cannot finally fall; and that he has attained this, who can say, old things are passed away; all things in me are become new." Now it is remarkable that St Paul declares, "if any man

If resurrection is to be literally fulfilled in all men, must not a subsequent and miraculous change take place in both the righteous and the wicked? In the first, because we know that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." In the last, because their torment will be eternal, which we know flesh and blood cannot endure.

16. Of the great and final judgment.—How will this awful catastrophe be regulated; by whom conducted; and upon what principles will its decisions proceed? Will the second person in the ever blessed trinity, veiled in the glorified humanity of the immaculate Jesus, be the sovereign judge on that momentous occasion? Will the saints be honoured with a share in the judgment of wicked men and evil spirits*? Will the martyrs of Jesus, the despised and afflicted followers of a crucified Saviour, then have the honour of sitting on thrones of glory, and pronouncing the righteous sentence of their exalted Redeemer, upon their murderers and persecutors? Will one rule of judgment govern the decisions of that august tribunal, or will there be distinct laws for the trial of Heathens, Jews, and Christians? Will rewards and punishments be awarded according to the merit or demerit of works alone? If so, how will it fare with the thief who was crucified with Christ, and who went with him to Paradise? In

be in Christ he is a new creature; in him old things are passed away, behold all things are become new!" 2 Cor. v. 17.—Put these two authorities together, and you have the final perseverance of every true believer in Christ asserted.

* See Matthew, xix. 28. 1 Cor. vi. 2 3.

such a case as his, will faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ, by which pardon and regeneration were obtained upon earth, be admitted as a substitute for the righteousness of the law in giving an indefeasible title to the reward of everlasting felicity?

17. Of the eternity of the misery of the damned. In supporting this as a principle of our belief, we are called upon to maintain it not only by declarations from scripture, which by some are considered as of dubious interpretation; but also from the principles of truth and justice, resident in the bosom of omnipotence. We should likewise be prepared to shew its consistency with the well-known goodness of that God, who we know delights in the happiness of all his intelligent creatures; and who has virtually redeemed every soul of man from the guilt and consequences of sin. It is indeed very possible, that the inflexible justice of God demands the eternal punishment of those who in this life reject the only means by which salvation is attainable, and that this presents an insurmountable barrier to the exercise of his mercy, towards the unhappy objects of that justice. Or perhaps other causes unknown to us may operate in producing that determination in the divine mind, which precludes the possibility of a period being ever put to their sufferings. Be that as it may, it appears to be necessary that an authentic decision should be given to this question, which certainly divides the sentiments of considerable numbers in the Methodist connexion.

18. Of the joys of heaven.—Will the permanency

and security of these be established on an immovable basis, beyond the possibility of defeat by any contingent circumstance? Upon what principles can that security be demonstrated? Will the freedom of the human will, for which we earnestly contend, and which, it appears, annually destroys its millions of souls on earth, have no unhappy influence upon the felicity of the redeemed in the kingdom of their heavenly Father? Will neither this or any other thing be able to cast a shade of doubt over the certainty of their eternal happiness? Why will this be more secure than was that of "the angels who kept not their first estate?"

In addition to these important and interesting subjects, which demand a more decided character than they at present possess among us, some queries respecting the principles on which the conversion of sinners is accomplished, appear to claim our attention. We shall state a few of these.

First, with respect to the operation of grace upon the heart of man. May we suppose the grace which bringeth salvation, to be influential in its operation, or illuminative only? If influential, can we ascertain the boundaries of that influence; to what point may it proceed without encroaching upon the sacred territories of free-will? But is not the cordial co-operation of the will, as well as the other faculties of the human mind, necessary to give effect to the grace of God in conversion? And if so, how is that co-operation to be obtained in any given instance? Is this a matter altogether contingent, or are we at liberty to suppose that the spirit of God has reserved

to himself such a legitimate authority over the will of man, as enables him, without violating the essential qualities of human nature, effectually to incline the heart of a sinner to embrace the offers of salvation proposed for his acceptance in the gospel of Christ?

The admission of this principle appears requisite to justify those prayers for the conversion, and final salvation of individuals, which are continually ascending from our pulpits and closets, to the throne of grace. In these we are abundant, and we appear to entertain no doubt either of our right to offer up those prayers, or of God's perfect ability to grant our petitions; yet it is certain we are not to this day settled in our principles, respecting the lawfulness of their accomplishment. According to the sentiments of some men of note among us, all such prayers should contain an ideal, if not an expressed condition, viz. "if the object of that petition shall perfectly and voluntarily coincide with heaven's gracious design towards him." Whereas, according to others, that coincidence of will, and a concurrent operation in the object, is the very point we aim at obtaining in the solicited conversion; the mainspring of which (if we may be allowed the expression,) we suppose is placed in the hands of omnipotence. On the other hand, there are some who are persuaded that all prayers for an effectual operation of converting grace in the human heart, are not merely idle and useless, but rather of an insulting nature towards God, as implying, first, that he had not already done all he could with propriety do, for the salvation of

every individual of the human race; and secondly, that we have more love for that soul for whom we pray, than God himself hath; and that we expect by our solicitations to persuade him to be more gracious than he really is* !

Such are the sentiments which divide the connexion, upon the subject of the influence of grace on the will and affections of a sinner; and were there no other cause, this alone is sufficient to hinder our progress in the great work of conversion; for the continual circulation of the preachers upon the itinerant plan through every part of the kingdom, gives a facility to the dissemination of those discordant principles, which must not only grieve the spirit of God, but oppose and frustrate the pious labours of those holy men among us, who are endeavouring, in the simplicity of their hearts, to preach the truth as it is in Jesus.

According to the best authenticated principles among us, we appear to admit that there is a na-

* It cannot be denied that God did more for the conversion and salvation of Peter than for that of Judas; more for Paul than he did for Pilate; and more for the Jewish nation than for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He hath done more for the British people than for the Hottentots of Africa, or the Bramins of Asia; yet we know that the equity of the divine government cannot be impeached, nor his righteous judgment arraigned at the bar of human reason. His judgments are unsearchable and his ways past finding out, yet we know that righteousness and truth are the habitation of his throne. He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, and in subservience to this, we pray for the conversion and salvation of our friends, not doubting of the willingness and ability of our gracious God to hear and answer our prayers.

tural aversion, and decided opposition found in every human breast to the knowledge and love of God. This, we believe, can only be conquered by the divine influence of the spirit of holiness, and the regenerating power of his grace; and these, we usually suppose, are adequate to the important work of conversion, in every given instance; at least, we dare not in general attempt to define the limits of either the goodness or the power of God in the conversion and final salvation of men. But as these principles are neither generally understood, nor universally admitted, we evidently want an authorised standard among us on which to fix and propagate them throughout the connexion.

There is another point, which being frequently connected with the practice of our people, and yet undetermined among us, appears to require official decision. This relates to the article of war; is this in any case lawful to a christian, or is it opposed in principle to the genuine spirit of universal love and forbearance, inculcated by the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, and consequently incompatible with the possession and enjoyment of that religion? If there are exempt cases, it might be necessary to shew the grounds upon which that exemption is reconcilable with the principles of the gospel.

Again: with respect to the observance of the sabbath day. Is this to be considered binding upon christians as a legal ceremony according to its original institution, and its violation consequently subject to the penalties attached thereto by the law of Moses? Or is it rather a christian privilege under

the glorious dispensation of the gospel, instituted by the primitive christians, under the influence of the holy spirit, in commemoration of the resurrection of their great redeemer, and observed by them as a testimony of their grateful love to him? Is its solemn dedication to the worship of God and the purposes of religion, intended as a means of conciliating the divine favour in a legal point of view; or as the source of increasing spiritual life and vigour to the worshippers? If this institution bears upon the christian dispensation with the same legal authority, and its observance is enforced by the same penal obligations as under the Jewish dispensation, who among us are free from the guilt of its violation? And in such case what are we to do with the decisions of St Paul, acting under the special inspiration of the spirit of God upon this point? We shall find these recorded, first, in his Epistle to the Romans*, where that apostle of the Gentiles appears to give considerable latitude to the christian churches in this respect, saying, "One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike; let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord, and he that regardeth not the day to the Lord he doth not regard it." Does St Paul here mean to say that both these men are equally innocent, and their works equally acceptable in the sight of God; and consequently that they are free from the legal observance of the Jewish sabbath?

* Chapter xiv. 5.

Secondly, in the Epistle to the Collossians*, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath day; which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." Does the holy spirit here relieve the christian churches from the legal observance of all Jewish ceremonies and holy days? If so, should not the Methodist body while they solemnly dedicate the first day of the week to the worship of their God and Saviour, declare they consider this as a christian privilege, and not as a part of that yoke, which an eminent Jew declared after his conversion to christianity, "neither they nor their fathers were able to bear?"†

The consideration and determination of the preceding points of doctrine appears to be absolutely requisite both to satisfy the minds of individuals, and also to diffuse a spirit of unanimity among our societies, without which it is vain to look for either peace or prosperity in the connexion. But doubtless, many other points of considerable importance will suggest themselves to the minds of those who may be appointed to prepare a complete digest of our principles‡. When this is once completed, it may

* Chapter ii. 16. † St Peter.—See Acts, xv. 10.

‡ It should be well understood that, in declaring our doctrines, and fixing our principles by the proposed code, we do not attempt to bind them authoratatively upon the consciences of any persons. We propose them merely as the objects of our belief, and as the spiritual constitution of Methodism; expecting the voluntary concurrence of our members, but requiring the perfect coincidence of our preachers, in their public capacities, with the essential doctrines

be found expedient to appoint an annual committee from the conference, whose sole business should be, during their session (which probably need not exceed one day,) to decide upon any questions which may occur, relative to the understanding or propagation of such doctrines as may be sanctioned among us; and also to reprove and restrain the promulgation of doctrines inimical to the principles of the connexion.

This committee, who would in fact constitute the censors of the connexion, would, of course, govern their decisions in all cases by the code of Methodism, and their acts might form an advantageous appendage to the Minutes of Conference. Thus we should perceive an annual increase in wisdom; our principles would become clear and permanent, and their unequivocal meaning universally disseminated. An end would hereby be put to the jarring sentiments which now divide the preachers and people; and to those dissensions which will ever be the bane of religion, and are particularly destructive of that union of sentiment and affection, which is the only bond of the Methodist connexion.

The second branch of the code, viz. that relating to discipline, would be much easier to arrange than the former. It would principally consist of a judicious compilation of all the existing rules of the societies both general and local, extracted from the Minutes of Conferences and other authentic documents, from the commencement of Methodism to

therein contained. The harmony necessary for our future prosperity, appears to demand the concession of this from every preacher in the connexion.

the present day. These have been occasionally varied as the changing circumstances of the connexion demanded their alteration and improvement. The committee appointed to prepare this, would doubtless be armed with a discretionary power to expunge, alter, or otherwise improve any branch of discipline, which the experience of the years which have elapsed since its original institution, may point out as susceptible of such improvement, subject to the final adoption or rejection of the conference.

It appears to be highly expedient that the entire code should be compressed into as narrow a compass as possible, well connected and judiciously arranged, with an alphabetical index; and placed within the reach, at a trifling expence, of every member of the connexion, not one of whom should be without it. In the course of the ensuing chapter we shall have an opportunity of entering more minutely into some subjects connected with the latter branch of our code; but, prior to its final arrangement, perhaps it might be well to give a general invitation to the societies over the whole kingdom, to communicate with the committee upon such points as appear to them to demand a revisal, and to suggest such alterations and improvements as may be deemed requisite for the future harmony and extended prosperity of the connexion.

CHAP. IX.

A REVIEW OF THE GENERAL DISCIPLINE OF THE CONNEXION, WITH OBSERVATIONS.—SOME ALTERATIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS SUGGESTED, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO THE QUALIFICATIONS AND APPOINTMENT OF YOUNG PREACHERS.—A PLAN FOR MORE EASILY AND EFFECTUALLY PROVIDING FOR THEIR IMPROVEMENT AND GENERAL UTILITY PROPOSED.—CONCLUSION OF PART FIRST.

SECTION I.—*Of Class and Band-Meetings, &c.*

IN taking a general view of the discipline of the Methodist societies, it must be acknowledged that, in point of simplicity, utility, and comparative excellence, they are not equalled by any other religious body in the British dominions, or perhaps in the world. The rules of the society, which may be considered as the foundation of the connexion, must be admitted to be superior to any thing of the kind found in modern churches, and admirably calculated to promote the great end and design of their original institution, viz. to unite the members of the societies together in the bonds of christian fellowship, for the purpose of more effectually securing, in the possession of genuine religion, the present and eternal happiness

of every individual, rendering each an useful member of civil society, as well as an ornament to his religious profession *.

The entire body of the Methodists is divided into classes, consisting of an indefinite number, from twelve to twenty, or occasionally more, of which one is denominated the leader; these classes meet once a-week, spending about one hour together, in social intercourse and religious worship. During this interval the leader inquires into the religious experience and spiritual prosperity of each individual, reproving, exhorting, or encouraging as he finds occasion; the contributions of each member are then collected †, and after singing and prayer, with which the meeting of each class begins and ends, they separate.

Experience has taught us, that nothing can be better calculated than these meetings, to unite the body of the connexion in one common interest, and to advance the spiritual and eternal welfare of each member. It is the external cement of Methodism; and is perhaps the most effectual means of producing and extending that spirit of genuine piety and reciprocal affection, which should be at once the distinguishing mark of a religious society, and the medium of its union with the church of Christ upon earth,

* As these rules are not generally known, a copy of them will be given in a Supplement at the end of this work, Article, No. I. It is not saying too much for these to assert, that they bear the stamp of genuine wisdom and true piety, and have been productive of the most beneficial effects to the connexion.

† These are usually one penny from each member, and it goes towards the maintenance of the preacher and his family.

as well as with its glorified head, in the mansions of eternal felicity.

It is indeed highly probable that, under the blessing of providence, Methodism owes not only its unprecedented success, its rapid progress, and extended prosperity, but perhaps its very existence at the present time, to the influence of class-meetings; an arrangement this, into which Mr Wesley was providentially led while contemplating another object*, but for which we never can be sufficiently thankful. We are fully convinced that, without this most excellent institution, all our public worship would avail little either towards the conversion of individuals, or the union and prosperity of the body. We say, therefore, let class-meetings be ever prized and esteemed among us as a most important and invaluable branch of discipline, upon the due improvement of which, and of the many blessings we derive from it, depends our present prosperity as a religious body, and our everlasting happiness as members of the church of Christ. Yet it is evident that purity of doctrine and unanimity of sentiment are essentially requisite to give

* Mr Wesley thus records the occasion of this.—Feb. 15, 1742, he observes: "Many were met together at Bristol to consult concerning a proper method of paying the public debt contracted by building, and it was agreed, 1st. That every member of the society that was able, should contribute one penny a-week. 2d. That the whole society should be divided into little companies, or classes, about twelve in each class. 3d. That one person in each should receive the contributions of the rest, and bring it in to the stewards weekly. Thus began, (says he,) that excellent institution, merely upon a temporal account, from which we reaped so many spiritual blessings, that we soon fixed the same rule in all our societies."

full effect to those social and religious meetings, and great attention should be paid in all cases to the principles, the talents, and the piety of the leaders.

Next to class-meetings stand the band-meetings. These are more select than the classes, they generally consist of from five to ten members, who enter into a close communion with each other relative to their christian experience, their trials and temptations. One of these acts as leader: these meetings, when properly conducted, have been found highly beneficial to the interests of vital holiness. The rules by which they are governed*, speak the nature and design of the institution, which constitutes an important and interesting feature in the character of Methodism.

Besides these meetings there are public love-feasts, usually held once in three months, at which all the members of the classes and bands assemble. The external part of this feast is very simple, it consists in eating a morsel of bread, and drinking a small draught of water; which seems to have been introduced as emblematical of the christian love, which dwells in the hearts of the people, and the reciprocal affection which unites the whole society together. At these solemn meetings each member is at liberty, and is generally expected to make a public declaration of the state of his mind, of the progress he has made in the knowledge and love of God, the depth of his experience in the ways of piety, and height of his attainment in the favour and image of

* See Supplement, Article No. II.

that God whose adopted child by faith in Jesus Christ he is, or professès himself to be. If he is only in pursuit of those invaluable privileges of the children of God, he mentions the true state of his mind; and each member as he ceases to speak, receives a suitable reply from one of the preachers present, two or three of whom are usually present on these occasions.

These love-feasts are supposed to be formed upon the model of those which existed in the primitive churches, and to which frequent allusions are made in the epistles of the New Testament *. But it is highly probable that these primitive assemblies were sacramental occasions; and yet that they were of a more social character, and the conversation more free and familiar in them than in our modern love-feasts. Indeed, there can be little doubt that our Lord, in the institution of his supper, intended it should be celebrated by his real followers in a free and familiar, though in a solemn and devout manner; not as a direct act of religious worship, but as one wherein they commemorated, with grateful hearts and joyful minds, that glorious sacrifice, which, appeasing the wrath of heaven, sealed their redemption in the precious blood of Emanuel, and gave them a right to the joys of an endless felicity; and not bearing so much of the formality of worship, as the mode by which it is now practised in the established churches.

In perusing the eleventh chapter of St Paul's First

* See 2 Peter, ii. 13.—Jude, 12, &c.

Epistle to the church at Corinth, we plainly perceive that this was the mode of celebrating the supper of the Lord, under the immediate direction of the apostle himself; abuses of that holy institution, however, having even then arisen from the carnality of some members of that church, renders it probable, that similar faults in others, ultimately introduced the more formal solemnity of the mode subsequently adopted by succeeding ages. If this alteration was attended with some advantages, if it checked the licentiousness which threatened to disgrace the celebration of that institution, it must not be forgotten that out of this very thing sprang the idolatry of the mass. Had the original simplicity of administering this holy ordinance been retained in the churches of christianity, it is scarcely possible to conceive that the worship of the wafer would ever have been introduced as an essential appendage to the religion of Christ, nor the dream of transubstantiation propagated as the truth of inspiration.

Whether the Methodist body in Ireland will ever possess the resolution, the piety, and the integrity, requisite to the assertion of their undoubted privileges, and the actual assumption of their unquestionable rights in the administration of their own ordinances, is a question which time alone can solve; but should this happy event ever take place, it is devoutly to be wished, that the mode of their administration may be brought as near as possible to that of the original institutions in the apostolic churches. Simplicity is one distinguishing characteristic of the religion of Jesus; and we trust, the

piety of the Methodists will prevent that simplicity among them from degenerating into indecorous familiarity. A portion of ceremony is certainly requisite in the present state of human nature, to support the respect due to religion; but the more of genuine piety we possess, the less ceremony shall we require.

Every member of the Methodist societies on his admission, receives a ticket, containing a text of scripture, and bearing the signature of the preacher, as a token of his membership; these tickets are renewed quarterly, and on those occasions a small contribution is collected, towards defraying the expences incident to the establishment. If any member is accused of conduct unbecoming the christian character, he and his accuser are brought face to face before the preachers and leaders; if guilty, he is reprimanded, and exhorted to repentance and amendment; but if found incorrigible, is expelled from the connexion, which is done by withholding the quarterly ticket. No man, however, is ever finally or irrevocably expelled; but upon exhibiting tokens of penitence and reformation, is at all times eligible to readmission. In these branches of our discipline we recognise the principles of wisdom and true piety; and are of opinion, that under our present system, they only require to be judiciously enforced, as the means of preserving the connexion free from external blemish, and the influx of that impiety and profaneness which too often characterise the members of other religious bodies *.

* This is unquestionably true in a general point of view; yet, it

Section II.—*Of the Officers and Preachers, &c.*

The officers attached to the Methodist connexion are, 1st, leaders; 2d, stewards; 3d, local preachers; 4th, itinerant preachers. The leaders, whose business has been already mentioned, are chosen by the preachers, leaders, and stewards on each circuit, and

may be questioned if our class-meetings are not susceptible of some improvement in the point of distinction of character. According to our present mode, we place saints and sinners in one rank; that is, persons of the highest religious attainments, in the same class with those who only express a feeble desire to flee from the wrath to come, but who have not even repented of their sins, much less obtained either the forgiveness of sins, or the faith which introduces the soul into the glorious liberty of the children of God. We admit each of these characters promiscuously into the privileges of religious fellowship; and hence, sinners are indiscriminately classed with those, who, having attained to purity of heart, are entitled to enjoy what should be considered as exclusively "the communion of saints."

There is evidently a defect in our discipline in this point; and much evil may arise, and has resulted from this unguarded intercourse. By this means improper persons have often gained admittance into our most select meetings, and the experience of our holiest members has been the subject of ridicule and diversion among the unholy and profane. Band-meetings have been instituted as a remedy against this, but they do not fully answer the end. Our classes should be divided into at least, those for penitents, and those for true believers. A third kind also might be advantageously instituted for the reception of returning backsliders. A very little experience would probably convince us of the utility of this regulation.

are subject to removal by the same authority which appoints them. Their stations are changed with respect to the classes, as circumstances may require, but they are not dismissed from their office unless convicted of conduct unbecoming the profession of a christian. All the leaders of a society are in the habit of meeting the preacher generally once a-week, for the purpose of arranging prayer-meetings, paying the contributions of their classes to the steward, and transacting any local business which may occur. The stewards are appointed by the same authority, and it is their principal business to receive and disburse the local funds of the connexion. There are stewards for particular societies, and a general steward for each circuit. Stewards are proposed by the preachers, and elected by a majority of leaders; none of them can remain longer than two years in office unless re-elected.

The various duties and privileges of the leaders and stewards, are detailed in the Minutes of Conference, to which any of our members can easily refer; but as these differ in some respects from the present regulations in England, we shall give in the Supplement a copy of the plan of pacification, which was adopted at the British conference in 1795*. The excellent institutions of that conciliating plan, induces a wish that they may ultimately be admitted as the basis of our discipline in Ireland. The entire assimilation of the two countries in these particulars, will probably be necessarily a work of time; but

* Article, No. III.

every step by which we approximate to the state of Methodism in England, may be considered as an advance towards the ultimate perfection of which our religious establishment is susceptible.

In the month of April 1812, a general meeting of local preachers, stewards, and leaders of the Newry district, was convened at Portadown, in the county Armagh, at which a memorial was prepared, containing a number of resolutions, and pointing out various regulations and improvements in points of discipline, and in the management of the public funds of the connexion, which, as they contain some important observations, and appear to be closely connected with the general interests of Methodism, a copy of that document will be also annexe to the Supplement*. The requisitions of that meeting were not fully attended to by the conference to which they were addressed, but they probably had the effect of eliciting some wholesome regulations which appear in the minutes of both that, and the succeeding conference.

The mode of selecting and appointing preachers in the Methodist connexion, will be found detailed in the following extract from a communication upon that subject, with which the author has been kindly favoured by a particular friend, who is himself one of that respectable body.

"The many meetings for prayer, exhortation, and religious experience, with which the Methodist connexion is favoured, afford opportunities for young

* Article, No. IV.

men of piety and talents to step forward as public characters, first by praying in class and prayer-meetings, where if it appears to the preachers and leaders that they possess the spirit and gift of prayer, they are encouraged to exhort, or when reading the scriptures in public, to make a few remarks on what they read.

"If God blesses them with success in this sphere, by making them instrumental in the awakening of the careless, or comforting the afflicted, they are allowed and encouraged to speak from a text, and after some time receive a certificate from the superintendant of the circuit as a local preacher.

"Our circuit preachers being all selected from the local, when it appears to the former that any among the latter have abilities for the work of the ministry in a more enlarged sphere, the superintendant proposes him or them to the leader's quarterly meeting, as a fit person to travel in the connexion; and if they consider him qualified to take a circuit*, he is proposed by the same preacher to the district meeting where he is personally examined, and then to the general conference for admission on trial. Here his

* It would appear, however, that the point of submitting the qualification of a candidate for the ministry to the leaders' meeting, is rather conceded by the preachers, than given to, or claimed by the leaders as a matter of right. The Ninth Article of the Portadown Resolutions, however, demands the sanction of a quarterly meeting of stewards and leaders, officially signed by the general steward of the circuit, to be presented both to the district-meeting and conference, prior to the admission of a preacher on trial. (See Supplement, Article IV.)

character and abilities undergo the strictest investigation, close inquiry being made into his piety, virtuous conduct, religious experience and knowledge, prudence, integrity, and diligence in his former occupation. Also, whether he has had any fruit resulting from his spiritual labours; if he is in debt, or under any matrimonial engagement, and if he possesses the talents, and information upon the doctrines of the gospel, requisite to render him an useful and acceptable preacher.

"Should no sufficient objection arise out of any of these points, his name is entered on the list of reserve, and when a vacancy occurs he is called out. But he is now only admitted on trial; on which he remains from this period until he has travelled four years: during that time his conduct is closely attended to, and at each intervening conference, his character is as strictly scrutinised as at the first.

"When a preacher has passed through his four probationary years acceptably, he is received into full connexion by the president of the conference in the public congregation; at which time he gives an account of his conversion, his call to the ministry, and his assent to the leading doctrines of the gospel. The president then addresses him with a suitable exhortation and advice, and puts into his hands our doctrinal and disciplinary minutes, to which he had previously given his public assent, and the business is concluded with prayer."*

* If a preacher marries before he is taken into full connexion, he is dismissed: not because the act is considered criminal, but as he has no certainty of being continued until the period of his pro-

No preacher possesses any higher rank or greater authority in the connexion than another, except in the offices of superintendant of the circuit in which he is stationed, chairman of the district, or president of the conference; to which offices all preachers in full connexion are equally eligible, and they are annually appointed by the conference. There is also a book-committee annually chosen for the superintendance and management of that department, and these continue in office till the ensuing conference.

Section III.—*Official Meetings.*

Ireland is, by the Methodist societies, divided into ten districts, containing forty-nine circuits, besides eight missionary districts, which usually embrace parts of the others, to which the regular preachers cannot have so ready access *. In the month of June in each year, the preachers of every district assemble in their several departments, the chairmen having been appointed at the preceding conference. These meetings are preparatory to the general conference, they are found extremely useful for the arrangement of many local concerns, and considerably

bation is expired, his rejection might be a disappointment to the woman he marries. Neither will our funds admit of taking out married men; nor is this ever done when a single man can be obtained who is qualified for the work.

* Minutes of Conference for 1813.

lessen the labour, and shorten the time of the preachers at conference.

On the first Monday in July, the annual conference sits in Dublin *. At these assemblies Mr Wesley originally presided, and continued to do so, generally during his life-time. Since his death, the Rev. Doctor Coke has frequently filled that office; but latterly Doctor Adam Clarke has been invited to it. He has twice occupied the president's chair, and we are glad to learn that he is expected to do so at the ensuing conference. The very eminent talents of Doctor Clarke render him most eligible to that important office, and his kind acceptance of the invitation very justly gives universal satisfaction; we indulge the hope of seeing him in that station as long as life permits him to fill it.

The entire management or direction of all the public concerns of Methodism, temporal and spiritual, is vested in the conference. During its session a great

* This body, as it stands connected in the original institution of Methodism, is a branch of the English conference, which consists of one hundred members, legally appointed and enrolled in the High Court of Chancery. This number is constantly kept up by the election of a successor, on the death of any individual. Eight of these are resident in Ireland, and this number is to be increased to ten, at which it is to be stationary. In order to preserve the appearance of an union between these two branches of the connexion, it is customary for the president of the Irish conference to be deputed from the British; and it is usual for one or two delegates from the Irish, to attend the English conference. In both parts of the united kingdom every preacher in full connexion has a seat and a vote in conference, although not one of the hundred legal members.

variety of business is transacted. The principal part of this consists, first, in the examination of the preachers characters and conduct; and receiving new preachers into connexion. Secondly, arranging their appointments for the ensuing year. Thirdly, settling the various accounts of the different circuits, and regulating the general finances of the connexion, with the expences of building chapels, &c. and, lastly, in consulting generally what can be advantageously done for the further increase and prosperity of religion in the connexion. Committees are also appointed, both before and during the conference, to assist in those arrangements, and the session generally terminates in about ten days.

The Minutes of Conference, which are annually published contain a statement of its acts and accounts; and these are sometimes accompanied with an address to the body of the people*. The English and Irish conference also mutually address each other in the terms of reciprocal affection, and expressive of the interest which each feels in the wel-

* The minutes of 1812 contain a very forceable appeal to the people on the subject of the finances of the connexion, which were previously in a very embarrassed state. By a well-timed and very general exertion throughout the kingdom, that embarrassment was in a great measure relieved for the moment; but it will return again, and recourse must again and again be had to extraordinary exertion to meet the still increasing exigencies, unless our system is radically altered, and in some degree assimilated to that of the English connexion. As the document here referred to throws some light on the state of our financial department, a copy of it is given in the Supplement, Article V.

fare and prosperity of the other, and of the people committed to their charge in the Lord. These minutes are properly disseminated over the whole kingdom, and, with all other publications belonging to the connexion, may be purchased from any of the preachers.

Section IV.—*Improvement of Young Preachers.*

Perhaps one of the principal disadvantages under which the Methodist connexion labours both in England and Ireland, but particularly the latter, is the want of a suitable education for its ministers. The want of this is severely felt, and yet, owing to the peculiar mode of their selection, as this stands united with the general economy of the connexion, it is extremely difficult to devise, and perhaps much more so to put in practice a plan at once adequate to meet the exigencies of the case, and yet within the reach of our very limited finances.

It is impossible for the Methodist body to educate its ministers, as other religious communities do; that is, from the earliest period at which the human mind is susceptible of imbibing that knowledge which is requisite as a foundation for any degree of exellence in the important work of the ministry. The reason of this is obvious; we properly make conversion to God, real regeneration of heart, a primary and indispensable qualification for the office of a minister of the gospel. Most other religious bodies, who esteem conversion to be essential

to the character of a minister, appear to consider it either as a secondary point, or one, the attainment of which must be left to chance; while human learning is evidently placed in the first rank of ministerial qualification; and with the established church this appears to be the *summum bonum* of a clergyman, and indispensably requisite (where patronage is doubtful,) to enable him to attain to the enjoyment of a rich benefice.

But the case is very different with the young Methodist preacher. Piety is with him a most important and primary consideration; and from the rank in society from which the providence of God usually selects those who fill the successive vacancies occasioned in our ministry, by death or superannuation, it is but seldom we can unite the polish of education with that experimental knowledge of religion which we require in our preachers. Hence we often find them like the diamond in the quarry, possessing indeed the intrinsic stamina of an able minister, but generally destitute of the embellishments of human literature, and sometimes unadorned with even that degree of education, which is now requisite to enable them to fill their important stations, either with comfort to themselves, or credit to the connexion which has adopted them.

The religion which is inculcated in the Methodist societies is not that of the cloister, nor are its votaries called upon to relinquish the sweet attractions of society, or to embrace the austerity of a recluse as a necessary qualification for the joys of heaven. On the contrary, it assumes the amiable aspect of its

divine and benevolent author, and like him in the days of his flesh, it intermixes with all the common acts of life, and carries its benign influence through all the walks of social intercourse, cheering every heart, animating every countenance, and diffusing a heaven-born beam of celestial joy through every social assembly. In its extensive circle it embraces the whole creation, and explores every part of nature, while it exhausts the treasuries of grace, in search of matter, whereon to erect the praise of its adorable author, and spread the flame of evangelical love to every human heart.

Hence the important duties of a preacher are not confined to the labours of the pulpit, nor the instruction he is expected to disseminate, limited to the class-meeting. He must be qualified not merely to bear a part, but to take the lead in religious conversation, and in the propagation of that general knowledge, which, while it imparts true dignity to human nature, enables us to fill our respective stations in life, with pleasure to ourselves and profit to others. Some portion of this is absolutely requisite in a minister of the gospel; the possession of it will render him both acceptable and useful, while its want, in the present enlightened state of society, will infallibly expose him to contempt or perhaps derision. The Methodist congregations are becoming much more numerous, and are composed of a more respectable, and more enlightened class of people than they were a few years ago; and as these are the sources from whence our societies are derived, it is at once our highest wisdom, and our soundest policy, to

adopt the most effectual methods which we innocently can, for enlarging those societies from the respectable ranks of the community.

A minister of the gospel should be qualified to follow the example of St Paul: he also is "a debtor both to the wise and to the unwise;" so, as much as in him lies, he should be ready to preach the gospel to both;* and, as far as the purity of his religion will permit, to be "made all things to all men, that by all means they may save some."† Well instructed in all the branches of speculative divinity, and particularly conversant in those doctrines which are justly considered as the glory of Methodism, a preacher in our connexion should be prepared to display those sources of salvation to the minds of his hearers, in language suited to the dignity and importance of the subject; to demonstrate their truth and consistency by sound and rational argument, and to illustrate their glorious efficacy from the pages of history, as well as from the oracles of inspiration.

Philosophy also is the handmaid of religion; it is the science of nature; and the christian rejoices in knowing that the God of nature is the author of his religion‡. The herald of that religion, should therefore be prepared to lead the minds of his hearers into the contemplation of those wonders in nature, which, while they demonstrate the existence of a deity, assert his transcendent power, and display

* Romans, i. 14. 15. † 1 Cor. ix. 22.

‡ Psalms, viii. 3. ixi. 1.—Romans, i. 19. The pious reader will not be displeased by the introduction of the following stanzas of

consummate wisdom in unison with ineffable goodness. The sacred writings are full of the noblest images drawn in the arcana of nature, in illustration of the gospel of Jesus, and of the blessings which flow from its experimental knowledge; and every minister of the gospel should be qualified to press into the service of his adorable master, and of his church militant on earth, every circumstance in the economy of nature, as well as in the annals of grace.

It is in vain, however, to look for those qualifications in the untutored minds of most of our young

one of the finest hymns in the English language, illustrative of this divine subject. It is a fine poetical paraphrase of part of the 147th Psalm.

Praise ye the Lord! 'tis good to raise
Your hearts and voices in his praise:
His nature and his works invite,
To make this duty our delight.

Sing to the Lord; exalt him high,
Who spreads his clouds around the sky;
There he prepares the fruitful rain,
Nor lets the drops descend in vain.

He makes the grass the hills adorn,
And clothes the smiling fields with corn:
The beasts with food his hands supply,
And the young ravens when they cry.

But saints are lovely in his sight,
He views his children with delight!
He sees their hope, he knows their fear,
And looks, and loves his image there.

preachers. The class of society from which a majority of them have originally sprung, presents but a barren source of either native talent, or acquired information *. Many of these, however, to their everlasting honour, have, by dint of assiduity and perseverance, surmounted the difficulties which their limited mode of education opposed to their improvement, and embracing with avidity the means which their dedication to the work of the ministry afforded them, have, subsequently to their appointment as preachers, enriched their minds and improved their understandings, while their hearts and lives have been consecrated to the experience and propagation of vital godliness in the societies wherein they laboured. These have become "burning and shining lights" in their day and generation; they were the happy instruments of "turning many to righteousness," and having shone for a season here, as lights in a benighted land, they shall shine as resplendent stars of the first magnitude, in the kingdom of their God and Father, for ever and ever †. Many of these are gone to their eternal reward, but they are not

* It is a fact justified by repeated observation, that native talent is much more rarely found in the lower, than in the middle and higher ranks of society. This may perhaps be accounted for by the circumstance of its being in a great degree hereditary: when a man of superior talents is providentially placed in low circumstances, his native genius soon opens the way for his advance in life, and his posterity often inherit both his talents and that wealth which is the result of their successful exertion. Exceptions to this, however, may of course be expected.

† Daniel, xii. 3.

forgotten; "the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance," and their noble example stimulates their successors to tread the same glorious path to the mansions of eternal felicity.

As the office of a minister of the gospel is the most important, the most sacred, and the most honourable which it is possible for a man to enjoy, so the character of the minister should be considered as the most highly exalted upon earth. In comparison with "an ambassador of the most high God," all human honour dwindles to a shadow; all earthly dignity sinks into nothing. For what avails the transitory wealth, or the fleeting honours of this perishable life, when compared with the riches of that eternal inheritance to which the saints of God are entitled by an indefeasible conveyance? And if we bestow so much labour, if we incur so heavy an expence in bestowing upon our children the means of acquiring the qualifications requisite for their enjoyment of the uncertain riches of this life, surely it is incomparably more necessary to bestow on our preachers that instruction which is necessary to qualify them for the successful discharge of the interesting duties attached to their most important stations in the church of Christ.

But, if the character of a minister is dignified, the duties of his function are diversified and laborious; he is called upon not only to plead the cause of religion against the corrupted passions of mankind, but to defend her sacred truths from the assaults of infidelity, the folly of ignorance, and the obstinacy of prejudice. Hence the necessity of his being not

only "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," but able also to meet the adversaries of religion on their own ground, and to put to silence both the learned disputant, and the unlearned opposer of the truth as it is in Jesus. With the firmness of an apostle, and the wisdom of a philosopher, he should unite the energy of a missionary, and the zeal of a martyr; while the gentleness of his manners, and the ardency of his love, should exhibit at one view the perfection of that religion of which he is the advocate and the patron. In short, that religion, which it is his sole business to inculcate and diffuse, should shine conspicuously in all her intrinsic excellence, in all her amiable and endearing graces, in all her social attractions, as well as preceptive injunctions, in the heart and life of her advocate, that thus he may exemplify in his life the power of that religion which he promulgated from the pulpit.

The benefits which must result to the great cause in which we are engaged, from a happy union of these excellent qualifications in our ministers, are too obvious to require a proof, and too interesting to claim an apology for recommending them to our notice. It remains therefore, only to inquire how they may be attained on the simplest and most economical plan.

We take it for granted, that our leaders and preachers are uniformly actuated by the purest motives in the recommendation and adoption of a candidate for the important work of the ministry; that they sanction the appointment of none to that office,

who do not give ample proof of their present piety, and the prospect of future usefulness. Let an asylum be prepared for the reception of these candidates; here let them spend two, three, or four years in the improvement of their minds, in the acquirement of knowledge, and in the attainment of religious experience in a close and uniform devotion of their time and talents to the practice of piety, and the study of divinity, history, and philosophy. Let proper books be provided, and let the students exercise themselves and each other, under the direction of a proper superintendant, in writing sermons, and other essays on religious subjects, and in the public or private discussion of the leading doctrines of christianity; and in fortifying their minds with those arguments which afford the best defence of its important and interesting truths. During the period of their improvement here, they might occasionally make excursions into the adjacent country, towns, and villages, and there exercise in rotation their talent of preaching, combining their own improvement with the edification of others. Manual labour in the cultivation of a garden, would constitute an eligible mode of recreation, while it would promote the health of the students.

The superintendance of this asylum, might be advantageously entrusted to a superannuated preacher and his wife, and a committee be annually appointed by the conference for its management, and visitation. Its situation might be contiguous to the metropolis, which would give a facility of communication with the managers and visitors, who should probably al-

ways include the preachers of Dublin, for the time being.

The advantages which the connexion would derive from a well-conducted establishment of this description are not to be easily estimated. They would soon be seen and felt in such a way as would secure the cheerful contributions of all the societies in the kingdom towards its support. Instead of the raw untutored recruits which are now introduced in regular succession, to supply the deficiences of our ministry, who have every thing to learn, except the trade they are about to abandon, and whose ignorance and vulgarity render them often equally unfit for the pulpit or the parlour; instead of these, we should have well improved preachers, acquainted with the doctrines and discipline of Methodism, grounded in the principles of christianity, and prepared both by theory and practice to promulgate and vindicate those principles in the power and demonstration of the holy spirit; and every way qualified, as far as their improved capacities will admit, to be both acceptable and eminently useful ministers of the everlasting gospel*.

If we turn our eyes to other religious bodies, we shall find they uniformly afford us an example of the

* This institution, if adopted, might shorten the period of a preacher's probation, which now extends to four years, during which time, as has been already observed, he is not allowed to marry. The wisdom of this regulation may justly be questioned It appears to be laying a restraint on a young man, which religion does not require, and which it is certain neither reason nor nature sanctions. It savours of Popery, although it is highly probable it originated in

education of their ministers*, and the respectability of their congregations proves the wisdom of their institutions. If indeed there was a danger that the introduction of useful knowledge, would militate against the enjoyment of experimental religion, we should have good cause to dread the appearance of a disposition to cultivate it. Such a sentiment as this might have once prevailed in the lower ranks of Methodism; but the barbarism of those times is happily passed away, and we begin to see that knowledge is the best auxiliary to religion. In the Apostle Paul we see an eminent instance of the advantage which a faithful minister derives from a liberal education To this source we trace much of the pre-eminence which distinguished the character, and the success which marked the labours of that eminent apostle. But the examples which our own connexion affords of the advantage which religion derives from the union of learning with piety in a minister of the gospel, are amply sufficient to justify our most strenuous endeavours to procure the means of educating our preachers.

Probably but one sentiment concerning this pre-

the limited state of our finances, and their incompetency to support an entire married ministry. It is sincerely to be wished that the necessity of this could be fairly obviated.

* The Quakers are the only exception to this general observation. But as we do not expect any thing more than the ordinary influences of the spirit of God upon our preachers, we do not join that sect in neglecting the means which the providence of God hath put into our hands for the improvement of our minds, and the attainment of spiritual knowledge, as qualifications for the ministry.

vails among the wiser part of our connexion; they are convinced of the necessity of such an institution, and are well aware of the important benefits to be derived from it; but they are dubious of our ability to support the expence of such an establishment*. Indeed if we confine ourselves to mere speculative reasoning upon a subject of this nature, we shall not want for plausible pretexts to discourage every attempt to realize our hopes or our wishes. But then we profess to be christians, and as such to possess that faith which overcomes the world, and gives its votaries and the cause they espouse, a peculiar interest in the courts of heaven. We profess to believe that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and the cause in which as Methodists we are engaged, we emphatically call "the cause of God," and yet we hesitate to trust that God with the support of his own cause.

Whereas had we but a small portion of that faith

* Perhaps this expence would not be so great as at first view we might be led to imagine. A very small establishment would answer the end for a commencement, and the students could contribute in more ways than one towards their own support. By horticulture they could procure an ample supply of vegetables, and in many cases some portion of their time might be advantageously devoted to the business to which they had been brought up. St Paul thought it no disgrace to labour with his hands when engaged in the plantation of the primitive churches of christianity: our young students need not be ashamed to follow the example of the prince of the apostles. Nay, a greater than St Paul, we have good reason to believe, even Jesus, the great mediator of the new covenant, wrought at the manual labour of a carpenter, until 30 years of age, when he entered on the solemn duties of his important mission.

which, above a century ago, was the instrument of raising that noble edifice, the Orphan House or Christian College, at Glaucha, near Halle in Saxony, as it were out of the dust of the earth*; we should not be long without a suitable place for the education of our preachers. But there is one source from whence, by the interposition of providence, we might possibly obtain the means of establishing a seminary for the education of our ministers which has been strangely overlooked, but upon which we have a fair and legitimate claim, and one which, there is every reason to believe, would on the first application be instantly acknowledged, and duly honoured.

That claim is upon the government of the country†; and assuredly, no religious body in the British dominions has so strong and well-founded a claim upon the munificence of that government, as the Methodists have. It rests upon two distinct points, neither of which will admit of a dispute. The first is the vast and extensive benefit which has accrued

* An account of this wonderful transaction, translated from the original German, of Professor Augustus Hermannus Franke, the illustrious founder of that institution, may be had from any of our preachers; price three-pence.

† It is written in the prophet Isaiah respecting the true church of Christ, of which we know we constitute an essential part, that "Kings shall be its nursing fathers, and queens its nursing mothers." Kings and queens represent states and governments in the language of prophecy; and hence we perceive that our title to assistance from that quarter is founded upon the highest possible authority. What solid objection then can be urged against an application for it?

to the state of the country, by the improvement of the morals of the lower orders of society, through the medium of Methodist preaching, and other modes of instruction, which the unwearied exertions of our people have carried into every part of the empire. By the blessing of God upon these endeavours, how many thousands of idle and profligate characters, who were previously a disgrace to society, a burthen to their families, and a nuisance to the public, have been reclaimed to society, and restored to their families; their hearts and lives permanently changed, and themselves rooted and confirmed in habits of sobriety, industry, and piety, for the residue of their lives? Probably the British nation is this day some millions richer in consequence of these exertions for the last eighty years, than it would otherwise have been; and the comfort and happiness which have resulted to the reformed individuals themselves, and to their families and posterity, who can estimate? This is a subject which eternity alone can unfold. Upon this point then rests one branch of our claim on the aid of our country; and the proper supports of this are the gratitude and justice of that country.

The second point upon which our claim rests, is the well-known loyalty, and sincere attachment of our whole body to the king and constitution. This is not the effect of either coercion or corruption, it is a voluntary tribute to the superior excellence of that constitution, and the wisdom and moderation of our incomparable government. This is the result of principles interwoven with the constitution of Methodism, and flowing from that religion, the

fundamental principles of which are common to the established church, and to the Methodist societies*. If then the government has deemed it expedient from political motives to resort to a *regium donum*, to secure the otherwise dubious attachment of a dissenting ministry; if its liberality has been still more eminently displayed in the establishment

* This is a fact which ought to be universally known; Methodism emanated from the church of England, and its alliance to that establishment will evidently appear from a comparison of its fundamental doctrines with those of the church. For a proof of this we refer to the writings of Mr Wesley, and in particular to his "Appeals;" and it is well known that he uniformly deprecated a separation from her communion, always encouraging the members of his numerous societies to continue in close connexion with their mother church. It is true, providence has since led the Methodists of England to a separate communion, and we seek the same in Ireland; but we are driven to this by the want of the essentials of religion in the church, viz. the want of both piety and zeal in her ministers and members. To the doctrines, and even the rituals of the church, we feel no objection; these will be found in a great measure interwoven with our own establishment; but these are the mere shells of religion; we want the substance which those doctrines describe as our privilege, and which those rituals were intended, by the blessing of God, to convey to our souls. Had the clergy and laity of the church lived up to the experience of their own doctrines, and in the practice of their own rules, they would have been to all intents and purposes Methodists, and we should not have been driven to seek in a separate communion for that life and power of true religion, which is distinguished by the name of Methodism. Our separation, therefore, implies no discordance of principle; and we conscientiously honour and support that government which adopts and defends so excellent an establishment as the church ought to be, and would if its members were but faithful to their own principles and engagements.

and support of a Roman Catholic seminary at Maynooth, surely the Methodists, who are the legitimate children of the state, and the natural offspring of the church, have a most just and indefeasible claim upon a share of that bounty, which is so liberally bestowed in securing the attachment of doubtful friends, and disarming the hostility of avowed enemies *.

It is true we cannot seek this as a boon for the security of our loyalty, and attachment to our good king, and happy constitution; these we know rest upon a firmer foundation than purchase can afford; they spontaneously arise out of our integral principles as christians and British subjects. But it would be passing a very poor compliment to the British government, to suppose it insensible to a claim like ours, to admit that it has the policy to purchase the attachment of its wavering subjects, by pecuniary donations, and liberal endowments, and

* Vide Doctor Dromgoole's celebrated speech, delivered before the Catholic Board, on the 8th December, 1813. In that honest effusion of Catholic piety the most direct and positive hostility against the Protestant ascendency of Great Britain, both in church and state, is openly and decidedly avowed! This sentiment we know to be perfectly congenial to the vital principles of Popery; which, arrogating to itself absolute supremacy, broils with all the indignation of mortified pride and disappointed ambition, which the Protestant ascendency of these realms has imposed upon its extravagant pretensions. How thankful should we be to a kind and gracious providence, which interposes the wisdom and power of the British government as our shield of defence, from the malignant vengeance which these protected men meditate against both church and state!

yet assert it to be destitute of the justice, to reward the fidelity of its firmest friends and most steady supporters. This insinuation would be a libel upon the honour of the British legislature, which can receive no countenance but from the slander of its enemies.

To conclude; we see no reasonable objection to an application to the legislature for assistance in the education of our ministers, and the consequent support of our connexion: there is every reason to believe it would be graciously received, and readily complied with. The providence of God has given us a well-founded claim upon the justice, as well as the liberality of our country, and the present exigencies of the connexion demand the interference of its directors in this behalf; we therefore trust their wisdom will either sanction this, or devise some other equally effective plan for obtaining the means of instructing our preachers.

The importance, or rather the necessity of this, appears from the consideration that, under the blessing of providence, it is to the talents, the qualifications, and accomplishments of our ministers, in conjunction with the purity of our doctrines, the excellence of our discipline, and the depth of our piety, we must look both for the respectability of our congregations, and the increase and prosperity of our societies. But the main-spring of all is a wise, a judicious, and a pious ministry. Upon this point, therefore it is plain, too much care and attention cannot be bestowed.

From the view which we have already taken of

the Methodist connexion in Ireland, we are justified in the conclusion, that it contains the stamina of a most excellent religious institution, admirably calculated to promote experimental religion, and inforce the practice of piety in its members, while it diffuses the knowledge of the gospel through those neglected classes of society, to which neither the prospect of gain, nor the allurements of diversion, can draw the clergy of other denominations *. Unappalled by personal danger, and not discouraged by difficulties, insurmountable to the feelings of delicacy, the Methodist preacher, and particularly the missionary, penetrates the most uncultivated wilds, and carries with him the glad tidings of salvation. Inattentive to his own accommodation, and often at the risk of his life as well as health, he enters the abodes of wretchedness and poverty, and tenders to their disconsolate inhabitants the blessings of a free salvation: presenting to their view the reversion of a glorious inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away; as the

* There is, in the west of Ireland, a spot whereon stands a parish church. The tythes of the parish were always regularly collected, and paid to the incumbent; but it is a fact, that for above fourteen years together no religious service of any kind was performed in the church. At length the providence of God brought Methodist preachers to the spot: they were the means of awakening many to a sense of the duties of religion; the people then became anxious to have the worship of God set up in the parish, and upon a proper application being made, the minister was compelled to do the external part of his duty, and from that period the service of the church has been regularly attended to.

sure reward of the abandonment of their sins, and the cordial reception of the truth as it is in Jesus.

From these people, thus retrieved from the thraldom of ignorance and vice, new societies are formed, and the reformation of mankind keeping pace with the diffusion of religious knowledge, and the inculcation of the holy precepts of the gospel, the social virtues, blended with the knowledge of salvation, are disseminated to the remotest corners of the land. Many of the subjects of this reformation, having their eyes enlightened by the gracious influence of the spirit of God, perceive that their former teachers, if any they had, were abundantly more anxious to collect their stipends or receive their customary dues, than to emancipate the souls of their flocks from the bondage of sin, and point them to the Lamb of God for redemption in his blood. They have naturally imbibed an attachment to those who have been the instruments of their conversion from the error of their ways, and of their introduction into "the glorious liberty of the children of God."* But in proportion as this attachment has advanced, they have often incurred the displeasure, and become exposed to the resentment of their former teachers. Hence they have been frequently driven from the communion table, and in effect excommunicated from their former church ; and otherwise treated with unmerited contempt, being exposed to every species of practicable persecution.

Now, if the Methodists feel themselves justified

* Romans, viii. 21.

in thus gathering in the outcasts of other religious bodies, and in labouring to unite the members of other establishments with their societies, are they not bound by every obligation of conscience and justice to give to those societies the benefits of which they are deprived, when they forsake their former connexions to become incorporated members of the Methodist body? Certainly, every principle of reason as well as religion concurs in asserting that this ought to be done; nor is it easy to see how we can acquit ourselves in the sight of God for omitting it. It is indeed admitted, that the repulsion above alluded to is not universal, nor indeed very general; happily, the resentment of bigotry, and the prejudice of intolerance are sometimes restrained, and in many cases our people continue to associate in their religious communion, where they can do it with a safe conscience, with their former ministers and friends. But in other instances this is impracticable, and in all it is impolitic in us to place them under that necessity.

Hence it follows of course, that, at least in all towns and villages where our societies and congregations are sufficiently numerous, the hours of public worship in the Methodist chapels should correspond with those which custom has established as the most commodious to the public; and every ordinance of the christian religion ought, beyond the shadow of a doubt, to be administered in those chapels. But, besides those, we should have the benefit of our more private and select meetings continued, and these, by the blessing of providence, will always be

the means not only of distinguishing us as Methodists, but of preserving among us that salutary discipline, as the guardian of genuine piety, which we trust will ever be the characteristic feature of our establishment.

A very wise regulation, strongly recommended by the Conference of 1813, should be immediately adopted over the kingdom, viz. the building of pews in our chapels; the want of these is a most formidable hindrance to multitudes of respectable people, who would regularly attend our chapels, and largely increase our congregations, if they could be accommodated with seats for themselves and families. The silly prejudice which has long subsisted against this useful regulation, is at length yielding to the voice of reason, and the calls of necessity; we only want the spirit to put it in execution, and to make it general.

The author has now before him a correct statement of the various funds of the Methodist connexion, with the purposes to which they are appropriated, the deficiences which exist in some branches and how they are supplied from the redundancy of others*. He conceives, however, it would be unnecessary, as well as foreign to his design, to enter into a detail of the financial concerns of the connexion. Those who wish for particular information on these points, may obtain it from the minutes of conference annually published; by these it appears

* For this he is indebted to a particular friend, who is a travelling preacher.

in a general point of view, that it is with extreme difficulty the connexion can support itself, under its still increasing burthens; and the pecuniary embarrassments under which it labours, call aloud for some effective measure, which, by the blessing of a gracious providence, may be the means of relieving us from the pressure of accumulating debt. The two last conferences have indicated in their minutes, a very lively sense of the difficulties they have to encounter in the support of the establishment; for their relief they have adopted various economical arrangements, and recommended a variety of modes for increasing the collections and contributions of the societies throughout the kingdom*.

The Conference of 1813, was constrained to confess, that although "God has blessed us wonderfully in Ireland," yet "our increase of late years has not been equal to that of former years." This is indeed a fact well known, and by every true friend of the connexion deeply lamented. In forming their opi-

* It appears by the minutes of 1812, that the collection of class-money, viz. one penny in the week from each member (as formerly mentioned,) is by no means a universal regulation in this part of the united kingdom. It is a pity the connexion should suffer any inconvenience from the want of so small a sum. The person who is able, and yet not willing to contribute thus much towards the support of what he professes to believe to be the cause of God, is assuredly not worthy of a name in a christian society! The parsimonious wretch should speedily eject himself from all connexion with persons who desire to save their souls, and to dedicate their time and talents to the glory of God, and the prosperity of the gospel. One *Achan* of this description is sufficient to impede the prosperity of a whole society.

nion upon this point, the conference appear to take the proportionate increase of numbers as the principal ground of their calculation; but they subsequently refer to a want of diligence in attending to all the branches of Methodist discipline, and above all, the want of a sufficiently close, constant, and most spiritual walk with God (probably in preachers as well as people,) as sources and proofs of spiritual declension in the hearts and lives of our members.

These complaints are well founded. A conviction of their truth first induced the present writer to sacrifice his own personal ease and convenience, in undertaking the arduous task of pointing out what he conceives the defects of the connexion, and recommending those alterations, which the close observation of a series of years has convinced him are essential to the future welfare and prosperity of our societies, and perhaps to the existence of the connexion.

Something appears to be wanting to give our people a more lively interest in the support of Methodism, and to check the progress of that apathy and lukewarmness, which are evidently spreading their baneful influence over many of our societies. And something which would at the same time attract the attention, and engage the concurrence of many pious and well disposed persons who now only view us at a distance, and can scarcely be persuaded even to be occasional hearers in our congregations. If we were willing to learn, we might derive a world of instruction from the present prosperous state of the Methodist connexion in Britain; with preachers

by no means superior, if indeed equal, upon an average calculation, either in native talent or acquired abilities, to those of Ireland*, Methodism in England is advancing like an irresistible and overwhelming torrent, threatening no less than the total demolition of Satan's kingdom in its astonishing progress; and sounding the trumpet of the christian jubilee, as the harbinger of the universal spread of the religion of Jesus in its regenerating power over all the nations of the earth†. There indeed the ban-

* The writer does not here speak at random; he is no stranger to the talents of many of the preachers in both parts of the united kingdom, and has the pleasure of being well acquainted with some leading characters among them. If the general balance of piety is in favour of the English preachers (which is probably the case;) possibly the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the supper of the Lord by them, is one chief cause of the distinction. The last mentioned ordinance has a most happy tendency, when faithfully administered, to impress the mind with a solemn sense of the divine presence, and to infuse a sacred veneration for that holy religion, which leads the soul directly to the fountain of life and happiness, and admits its votaries into habits of holy intimacy and close communion with the great author of salvation. And if the people drink deeply of the streams of that salvation which flow from their living head, through the medium of those emblematic symbols, how great must be the comfort and edification of the faithful minister, who is, as it were, the channel through which those blessings reach the souls of the people!

† See an account recently published of the glorious revival of religion under the auspices of Methodism in Cornwall, where thousands have been suddenly turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, obtaining remission of sins, and an inheritance among the sanctified children of God, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

ners of salvation are unfurled, and the standards of redeeming grace are erected, while the Prince of Peace, the glorious Captain of our salvation, is riding on triumphantly in the chariot of the gospel, "conquering and to conquer." And so we trust he will continue to ride,

> "Till the whole earth is subdued,
> And the universe filled with the glory of God!"

Do we wish to participate in this glorious revival? Doubtless we do. Then let us remove every hindrance out of the way. Let us, in particular, divest ourselves of our time-serving principles; let us break off our unhallowed connexions with men who are strangers to the life and power of godliness, and celebrate the mysteries of our holy religion, with that purity of communion which we well know (however we may disguise our feelings,) must be well pleasing and acceptable to God. "Thus shall we be meet partakers of those holy mysteries," and the blessing of God shall descend in rich abundance upon our spiritual inheritance.

That this prolific subject would afford matter for far more extensive discussion, will be seen in the Second Part of this work, if the author is spared, and circumstances call for its publication. But he confidently trusts that the wisdom of the Methodists in Ireland will render that publication unnecessary. If, however, they continue to deprive themselves of their glorious privileges, as a branch of the true church of Christ upon earth, the author will feel it his duty to redeem his pledge, by laying his thoughts

before the public in a more extended form, upon this interesting and important subject. Till then he commends his work and his readers to the protection of him, "who is able to keep us from falling (into error or sin,) and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory, and majesty, dominion, and power, both now and ever. Amen!"

SUPPLEMENT.

Some documents having been promised in the preceding part of this work, as illustrative of the present state of our discipline, they are here annexed. These will give a general view to every one who feels an interest in the prosperity of the religion of Jesus Christ, both of the nature and present state of the Methodist connexion; and, taken in conjunction with the preceding observations, may assist the leading men among us to judge how far either our doctrines or discipline are susceptible of improvement. We confidently trust their wisdom will induce them to adopt such measures as may have a tendency, by the blessing of providence, to unite both preachers and people in sentiment and affection, and in the prosecution of whatever plans may be devised for the future prosperity of the connexion, and the eternal happiness of its members.

No. I.

RULES OF THE METHODIST SOCIETIES.

"THERE is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, a desire to flee from the wrath to come; to be saved from their sins: but, wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shewn by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation.

1st, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind, especially that which is most generally practised, such as the taking the name of God in vain; the profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or buying and selling; drunkenness; buying or selling spiritual liquors, or drinking them unless in cases of extreme necessity; fighting, quarrelling, brawling; brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling; the buying or selling uncustomed goods; the giving or taking things on usury, *i. e.* unlawful interest; uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers; doing to others as we would not they should do unto us; doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as the putting on of gold or costly apparel; the taking

such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus; the singing those songs, or reading those books which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God; softness, and needless self-indulgence; laying up treasure upon earth; borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

"It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation.

"2d, By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity of doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible to all men; to their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison; to their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that we are not to do good unless our hearts be free to it; by doing good especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another; helping each other in business; and so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them only.

"By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed; by running with patience the race that is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ; to be as the filth and off-scouring of the world; and looking that men should

say all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake.

" It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

" 3d, By attending on all the ordinances of God; such are, the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the scriptures; and fasting or abstinence.

" These are the general rules of our societies: all which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season; but then if he repent not he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls."

No. II.

THE BAND RULES.

While Mr Wesley was connected with the society at Fetter Lane, the rules of the band societies were drawn up, with the following title: " *Or-*

ders of a religious society, met together, in obedience to that command of God by St James, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another that ye may be healed." By the bands were meant little companies, not less than five nor more than ten, who met together for the above purpose: married men by themselves, and single women by themselves. When he withdrew from the Moravian society, he kept up the distinction of bands in his societies. The following are the rules,

"Questions to be proposed to those who desire to be admitted into the bands:

"1st, Do you enjoy the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins? And have you the peace of God in your conscience? 2d, Have you the love of God shed abroad in your heart? 3d, Have you the spirit of God bearing witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God? 4th, Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you? 5th, Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plainly? 6th, Do you desire that each of us should tell you whatever we think, or hear, or fear concerning you? 7th, Do you desire that in doing this we should come as close as possible; that we should search your heart to the bottom? 8th, Do you desire that each of us should tell you from time to time, whatsoever is in his mind concerning you? 9th, Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions, entirely open, so as to speak every thing that is in your heart without exception, without disguise, and without reserve.

"Our design is, 1st, To meet once a week at the

least. 2d, To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason. 3d, To begin exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer. 4th, To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have been exercised with since our last meeting. 5th, To end each meeting with prayer, suited to the state of each present. 6th, To desire some person among us to speak his own experience first, and then to ask the rest in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations. Such as, 1st, Have you been guilty of any known sin since our last meeting? 2d, What temptations have you met with? 3d, How were you delivered? 4th, What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be a sin or not?"*

* These rules were published in 1738; some farther directions were subsequently published, relative to the regulation of those meetings; and in 1745, Mr Wesley instituted the *Select Society*, or *Band*. This meeting was composed exclusively of those who walked in the light of God's countenance, enjoying constant fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the eternal spirit; and such as were earnestly athirst for the full image of God. The design of this meeting, and the rules for its regulation, may be seen in *Myles's Chronological History*, from whence the above extracts are made. Mr Wesley himself usually met the Select Bands until he was called to his eternal reward.

No. III.

PLAN OF PACIFICATION IN ENGLAND.

I.—*Concerning Public Worship.*

"1st, THE sacrament of the Lord's supper shall not be administered in any chapel, nor baptism administered, nor the dead buried, nor service in church hours, except the majority of the trustees of that chapel on the one hand, and the majority of the stewards and leaders belonging to that chapel (as best qualified to give the sense of the people,) on the other hand, allow of it. Nevertheless, in all cases the consent of the conference shall be obtained before any of these things be introduced.—It was also added, that these majorities must testify in writing to the conference, that they are persuaded no separation will be made thereby.

"2d, Where there is a society, but no chapel, if the society desire any or all of these things, the stewards and leaders of that society must attend to the same rule.

"3d. Where the Lord's supper has been already peaceably administered, the administration of it shall be continued in future.

"4th, Wherever the Lord's supper shall be administered according to the fore-mentioned regulations, it shall always be continued, except the conference order the contrary.

"5th, The Lord's supper shall be administered by those only who are authorised by the conference: and at such times, and in such manner only, as the conference shall appoint.

"6th, The administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, according to the above regulations, is intended only for the members of our own society.

"7th, We agree, that the Lord's supper be administered among us on Sunday evenings only, except where the majority of the stewards and leaders desire it in church hours; or where it has already been administered in those hours. Nevertheless, it shall never be administered on those Sundays on which it is administered in the parochial church.

"8th, The Lord's supper shall always be administered in England according to the form of the established church; but the person who administers shall have full liberty to give out hymns, and to use exhortation and extempore prayer.

"9th, Wherever divine service is performed in England on the Lord's day in church hours, the officiating preacher shall read either the service of the established church, our venerable fathers' abridgment, or at least the lessons appointed by the Calendar. But we recommend either the full service or the abridgment.

II.—*Concerning Discipline.*

"1st, The appointment of preachers shall remain solely with the conference; and no trustee, or number of trustees, shall expel or exclude from their chapels any preacher so appointed."

"2d, Nevertheless, if the majority of the trustees, or the majority of the stewards and leaders of any society, believe that any preacher appointed for their circuit is immoral, erroneous in doctrine, deficient in abilities, or that he has broken any of the rules above-mentioned, they shall have authority to summon the preachers of the district, and all the trustees, stewards, and leaders of the circuit, to meet in their chapel on a day and hour appointed (sufficient time being given.) The chairman of the district shall be the president of the assembly; and every preacher, trustee, steward, and leader, shall have a single vote, the chairman possessing also the casting voice. And if the majority of the meeting judge that the accused preacher is immoral, erroneous in doctrine, deficient in abilities, or has broken any of the rules above-mentioned, he shall be considered as removed from that circuit; and the district committee shall, as soon as possible, appoint another preacher for that circuit, instead of the preacher so removed; and shall determine among themselves how the removed preacher shall be disposed of till the conference; and shall have authority to suspend the said preacher from all public duties till the conference, if they

judge proper. The district committee shall also supply, as well as possible, the place of the removed preacher, till another preacher be appointed. And the preacher thus appointed, and all other preachers, shall be subject to the above mode of trial. And if the district committee do not appoint a preacher for that circuit, instead of the removed preacher, within a month after the aforesaid removal, or do not fill up the place of the removed preacher till another preacher be appointed, the majority of the said trustees, stewards, and leaders, being again regularly summoned, shall appoint a preacher for the said circuit, provided he be a member of the Methodist connexion, till the ensuing conference.

"3d, If any preacher refuse to submit to the above mode of trial, in any of the cases mentioned above, he shall be considered as suspended till the conference. And if any trustees expel from any chapel a preacher, by their own separate authority, the preachers appointed for that circuit shall not preach in that chapel till the ensuing conference, or till a trial takes place according to the mode mentioned above.

"4th, If any trustees expel or exclude a preacher by their own separate authority, from any chapel in any circuit, the chairman of the district shall summon the members of the district committee, the trustees of that circuit who have not offended, and the stewards and leaders of the circuit. And the members of such assembly shall examine into the evidences on both sides; and if the majority of them determine that the state of the society in which the

exclusion took place, requires that a new chapel should be built previous to the meeting of the conference, every proper step shall be immediately taken for erecting such chapel. And no step shall on any account be taken to erect a chapel for such purpose before the meeting of the conference, till such meeting be summoned, and such determination be made.

" 5th, No preacher shall be suspended, or removed from his circuit by any district committee, except he have the privilege of the trial beforementioned.

" 6th, The hundred preachers mentioned in the inrolled deed, and their successors, are the only legal persons who constitute the conference; and we think the junior brethren have no reason to object to this proposition, as they are regularly elected according to seniority.

" 7th, If a travelling preacher, local preacher, steward, or leader, shall disturb the peace of the society by speaking for or against the introduction of the Lord's supper in our societies, or concerning the old or new plan, so called, he or they shall be subject to the trial and penalties before-mentioned.

" 8th, We all agree the pulpit shall not be a vehicle of abuse.

" 9th, Nothing contained in these rules shall be construed to violate the rights of the trustees, as expressed in their respective deeds "*

* This plan was adopted at the conference of 1795, previous to which, the connexion had been much agitated on the points therein settled. The wisdom of this plan is evidently displayed in the subsequent peace and prosperity of the connexion in England.

No. IV.

MEMORIAL OF THE LOCAL PREACHERS, STEWARDS, AND LEADERS, ASSEMBLED AT PORTADOWN, APRIL 4, 1812, AND ADDRESSED TO THE CONFERENCE HELD IN DUBLIN, JULY 1812.

"SHEWETH,—That your memorialists have been, and still are, deeply affected with the embarrassed state of the connexion.

"That your memorialists met on the 23d of October last, to take into consideration the Dublin letter, and to consider what was the best method of attaining the end it proposed.

"That it then clearly appeared, that to raise class-money on the country parts of the northern circuits, was impracticable. Hence memorialists proposed a plan to the consideration of the body at large, which might supply the place of class-money. Memorialists only came forward to propose what they conceived would be a suitable, and effectual method of relieving you and your embarrassments, and to make provision for your legitimate demands, which they feel they ought to make; and by so doing, guard against such embarrassments in future.

"In examining these matters, your memorialists were led to consider various things, respecting the discipline and financial affairs of the whole body; and they conceived that there were various things

which might be improved. For which purpose, memorialists unanimously agreed to the following resolutions; which might be attended with the most beneficial effects, if they were recognised by the conference, as rules by which the whole body should act in future.

1. *Resolved*,—That the money collected in each circuit, usually called, *The Yearly Collection*, *Education Fund*, *Preacher's Fund*, &c. be entered in the stewards' books, in their respective circuits.

"2. That all bills for the support of travelling preachers and their families, such as deficiences of house-rent, fire, candles, &c. shall first receive the approbation of the leaders' meeting, and be signed by the stewards, before they can be brought to a district meeting. *

"3. That conference shall not add to the salaries of preachers, or their families, without first giving twelve months notice to the different circuits, that an opportunity may be given to the leaders to communicate their sentiments to the conference, upon a question of such importance.

"4. That conference be requested to give a satisfactory statement of the book-room accounts, and to publish in detail the different disbursements, and expences, of whatever nature or kind, which are chargeable upon the funds of the conference, or upon the circuits.

"5. That the conference shall be requested to re-

* The above not to interfere with the usual allowance to preachers.

vise and publish the laws, by which the Methodists of Ireland are governed.

" 6. That no person shall be admitted into society, without the consent of a leaders' meeting.

" 7. That no member shall be expelled the society, without the concurrence of a leaders' meeting, where such meeting can be obtained. The accused member to receive the charges, and the name of the accuser. And if the member so tried, shall consider himself agrieved by the decision of such meeting, he may appeal to the next quarterly meeting.

" 8. That no person shall be appointed to the office of a leader, or steward, or removed from his office, without the approbation of a leaders' meeting.

" 9. That no local preacher shall be admitted as a travelling preacher, without the approval of the quarterly meeting, and that approval in writing, signed by the general steward, to be presented to the district meeting, and to the conference.

" 10. That if conference make any new rule, and said rule be rejected by the September Quarterly Meeting in any circuit, first after said rule is made, such rule shall not be enforced until the next annual conference, as a means of preventing precipitancy in making new rules, and to give the conference an opportunity of knowing the sentiments of the connexion at large.

" Memorialists pray, that conference may take the premises into their wise consideration, and incorporate the whole, with those wholesome and godly rules, which have hitherto governed the body of the Methodists in this kingdom."

No. V.

ADDRESS FROM THE CONFERENCE OF 1812, TO THE MEMBERS OF THE METHODIST SOCIETIES THROUGHOUT IRELAND.

"DEAR BRETHREN.—On account of the embarrassed state of our connexion last year, a few friends who were particularly acquainted with our circumstances, presented an address to you; faithfully explaining our situation, and praying your kind interference. We now feel ourselves called upon to express our unfeigned gratitude for the affectionate interest which you have discovered in our concerns, and the liberal manner in which you have come forward, to relieve us from our difficulties.

"We have published in our minutes, a full and accurate detail of all our financial concerns, to which publication we beg leave to refer you. From this statement you will easily see the weight of embarrassment under which we still labour; for, after expending the whole of our ordinary collections, and drawing from the book-room every pound that could be spared from the book-trade, we were under the painful necessity of taking a considerable part of the collection for the general debt, to pay the current expences of the year, having no other possible way to meet them. We cannot expect that our demands will be less the year ensuing; nay, we

are concerned to say, they will unavoidably be more. From the nature of our establishment, our annual expences must necessarily increase; the reasons of this are obvious: most of our preachers are now married men; many of them have large and increasing families, and this will increase our demands for house-rent, fuel, &c. &c. when these things are taken into account, together with the high price of every necessary of life (the consequence of which you must feel yourselves, as well as your preachers,) the prospect which the present state of things presents, is indeed truly alarming. Nevertheless, when we consider the infinite bounty and love of God our heavenly Father, and the blessings both temporal and spiritual which he has conferred, and still continues to pour upon our dear people, we are thereby encouraged, and perceive a door of hope.

"You will not, therefore, think it strange, beloved brethren, that while we express our gratitude for your past exertions, we call upon you in the most tender and affectionate way, not only for your continued, but also for increased liberality. We earnestly intreat you to remember this, at the renewal of your quarterly tickets, and in your contributions to the several collections, made for our established funds. We particularly recommend the adoption of class-money, wherever it can be done without injury to the work of God; each member contributing one penny a-week, or more, according to disposition and circumstances. And we recommend this, as it appears to us the easiest and most effectual way of raising an adequate and permanent supply, to

meet our unavoidable, and still growing demands. The class-money thus collected we wish to be delivered into the hands of the general steward of each circuit, that by him it may be appropriated to the payment of house-rent, fuel, &c. If the different circuits would make it a point of duty to clear off their respective deficiences at our district meetings, according to the new regulation made respecting them, it would be one of the most effectual means of relief in our present difficulties.

"And now, my dear brethren, we assure you, that it is with no small degree of pain that we have submitted to the imperious necessity of making this open and candid appeal, which we confidently hope shall not be disregarded by any of you. We are deeply impressed with the importance of the sacred work, in which it hath pleased the great head of the church to employ us; and we never felt more determined than at this moment, to be fully and for ever devoted to his cause, studying and labouring in every way for your good. And we intreat you to enter heartily with us, into the same determination. Give yourselves wholly to him who freely shed his blood, and laid down his life for you. Help us also by your sympathy and your prayers; "and may the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

STATEMENT OF THE NUMBERS COMPOSING THE METHODIST SOCIETIES OVER THE WHOLE WORLD, WITH A VIEW OF THE RECENT INCREASE IN THE BRITISH DOMINIONS.

Number in Society in 1812.		*In* 1813.	*Increase.*
Great Britain.....	155,124	162,003	6879
Ireland.....	27,823	28,770	947
West Indies.....	13,042	15,220	2178
Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.....	1225	1522	297
	197,214	207,515	10,301

In 1813.			
France.....100	America...	216,000	
Gibraltar.....87			
Sierra Leone.....96	Total...	423,798	

Of the increase last year, which appears by the above to have been 10,301, in the aggregate only 947 fell to the share of Ireland: a small proportion this, and one which indicates that we labour under some radical defect in our general system, which opposes the prosperity of the connexion in this part of the united kingdom. May we have the wisdom to discover, and the grace and fortitude to apply the proper remedy to this defect; and may the blessing of providence rest upon our endeavours: may his holy spirit lead us into all necessary truth, and make and keep us a holy and a happy people, the witnesses of his grace, and the vindicators of his truth, to the end of time!

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX.

THE CONTROVERTED MINUTES OF 1770 DISCUSSED.

As the celebrated Minutes of Conference of 1770, will be the subject of discussion in the subsequent sheets, the following original letter from Mr Wesley to Lady *****, relative to the controverted principles of those minutes, may form an advantageous introduction to that discussion. In the latter part of this letter we perceive some symptoms of doubt in Mr Wesley's mind, as to the accuracy of the sentiments contained in those propositions, and also a candid acknowledgment of his own liability to error, with a final appeal to that christian charity which "thinketh no evil," but covereth a multitude of imperfections and blemishes with the mantle of love, in those whose hearts are right with God, and who live under the influence of his holy spirit and divine grace.

We most cordially admit this truly evangelical appeal; and honour the memory of Mr Wesley by confessing his upright and steady zeal for the glory of God, and the salvation of men, although as he himself observes, "There may be opinions maintained at

the same time, which are not exactly true; and who can be secure from these?" Those opinions, however, as expressed in the minutes, at present form an integral part of the fundamental principles of Methodism, being closely interwoven with its spiritual fabric; but as it is evident we are at the most perfect liberty to discuss them, we shall accordingly avail ourselves of this privilege. May we have grace to do it with a single eye, and an unprejudiced mind!

"My Dear Lady, *London, June* 19, 1771.

"Many years since, I saw, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." I began following after it, and inciting all with whom I had any intercourse to do the same. Ten years after, God gave me a clearer view than I had before of the way how to attain this; namely, by faith in the Son of God. And immediately I declared to all, "we are saved from sin, we are made holy by faith." This I testified in private, in public, in print;—and God confirmed it by a thousand witnesses. I have continued to declare this for above thirty years, and God hath continued to confirm the word of his grace; but during this time, well nigh all the religious world hath set themselves in array against me, and among the rest, many of my own children, following the example of one of my eldest sons, Mr W. Their general cry has been, "he is unsound in the faith, he preaches another gospel!" I answer, whether it be the same which they preach or not, it is the same which I have preached for above thirty years. This may easily appear from what I have published during that whole term. I instance only in three sermons: that on "Salvation by Faith," printed in the year 1738; that on "The Lord our Righteousness," printed a few years since; and that on Mr Whitefield's funeral, printed only some months ago. But it is said, "O but you printed

ten lines in August last, which contradict all your other writings." Be not so sure of this; it is probable, at least, that I understand my own meaning as well as you do: and that meaning I have yet again declared in the sermon last referred to. By that interpret those ten lines, and you will understand them better; although I should think that any one might see, even without this help, that the lines in question do not refer to the condition of obtaining, but of continuing in the favour of God. But whether the sentiment contained in those lines be right or wrong, and whether it be well or ill expressed, the gospel which I now preach, God does still confirm by new witnesses in every place: perhaps never so much in this kingdom as within these last three months. Now, I argue from glaring undeniable fact, God cannot bear witness to a lie; the gospel, therefore, which he confirms, must be true in substance. There may be opinions maintained at the same time which are not exactly true; and who can be secure from these? Perhaps I thought myself so once; when I was much younger than I am now, I thought myself almost infallible, but I bless God I know myself better now.

"To be short: such as I am, I love you well. You have one of the first places in my esteem and affection, and you once had some regard for me. But it cannot continue if it depends upon my seeing with your eyes, or on my being in no mistake. What if I was in as many as Mr Law himself? If you were, I should love you still, provided your heart was still right with God. My dear friend, you seem not to have well learned yet the meaning of those words which I desire to have continually written upon my heart; "Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

"I am, my dear lady, your affectionate

JOHN WESLEY."

In the preceding work the name of the late Rev. Mr John Wesley has been repeatedly mentioned, and uniformly with that respect and veneration which is due to the memory of a minister so eminently distinguished for superior talents, indefatigable industry, and great success, as he undoubtedly was; and which shone so conspicuously in his exalted character. Nevertheless, Mr Wesley, notwithstanding all his shining qualities, was a man of like passions with ourselves, and equally liable to the infirmities inseparable from the present state of human nature. That there was a degree of positiveness in his manner, is well known to his greatest admirers, and sufficiently conspicuous in some parts of his writings; yet this foible was in a great measure compensated by his willingness to correct any error in judgment, of which he was fully convinced; several instances of this are on record, some of which are alluded to in the preceding work, and they certainly reflect considerable honour upon his memory.

This was in full conformity to a sentiment he once uttered, which bespeaks at once the candour, the humility, and the integrity of his mind. Speaking concerning the doctrines taught and propagated in the Methodist connexion, he says: "Let us examine our doctrines to the foundation. Need we be fearful of doing this? What are we afraid of: of overturning our first principles? If they are false, the sooner they are overturned the better; if they are true, they will bear the strictest examination."*

Can we adopt a sentiment more congenial to our feelings as men, or more honourable to our principles as christians? Has not every man to answer for himself to God, and is he not at full liberty to investigate the particular doctrines, as well as the general principles which he is called upon to embrace? Doubtless this is not only

* Minutes of First Conference.

the privilege of every British christian, but his bounden duty. Our respect for Mr Wesley's judgment is great; our opinion of his integrity is immoveable; we readily ascribe to him the most upright intentions, and most ardent desire to advance the glory of God and the salvation of men, by developing, explaining, and enforcing the great truths of the gospel. And we record with joy and gratitude the fact, that few, if any, have exceeded him as a wise and successful, as well as laborious minister, since the days of St Paul.

It is, however, no disparagement to the memory of this great and good man, to follow his own precepts, "to examine our principles," to try them by the unerring standard of truth, found in the oracles of inspiration. If Mr Wesley were alive he would gladly assist us in this important work; but being gone to his reward, it is our duty, and the best testimony we can give of our respect to his memory, to tread in his steps, to walk in the way which he himself marked out for us, viz. To examine our doctrines by the word of God, which to us Methodists is the only primary rule of judgment and practice.

Let us then, as formerly proposed, in the true spirit of meekness and humility, take a review of the doctrines contained in the celebrated Minutes of Conference of 1770 which caused so great an outcry in the religious world of that day; and drew forth from his "beloved obscurity" the venerable and reverend Mr Fletcher, as a champion in vindication of the entire designs and motives, and the main part of the doctrines contained therein. This most able and pious advocate, actuated by the noblest motives, came forward with a zeal equalled only by the ardent love which animated his enlightened mind; and at the risk of losing his reputation, as an orthodox divine among his former friends, laboured to defend Mr Wesley's Minutes from the "dreadful heresy" of which the Calvinists of

that day had accused them. It does not appear that this able vindication was ever answered; and certainly it reflects the highest honour on the understanding, the piety, and the friendship of its venerable author. It is drawn up in a masterly manner, and managed throughout with that characteristic mildness and perspicuity which distinguish the controversial works of Mr Fletcher from his contemporaries; and it must also be confessed, the arguments it contains are for the most part just and conclusive, as far as they go.

Nevertheless, both the Minutes and their Vindication, were written in support of what Mr Fletcher terms "the second axiom of the gospel;" that is, "that all our damnation is of ourselves," arising from negligence of the means of grace, or unfaithfulness to the will of God; and that good works in their proper place are essential to salvation: all which are strictly and fundamentally true*. But in strenuously supporting these divine principles of truth, there was a possibility that the interests of the first axiom might be in some degree overlooked; and indeed, Mr Fletcher himself, even in his vindication, is obliged to acknowledge, that some parts of them are unguardedly written. In them Mr Wesley observes, "we have leaned too much towards Calvinism;" and in avoiding that extreme, it is by no means improbable that he might lean too much towards Arminianism; the truth of God generally lying between these two extremes.

* The first gospel axiom, according to this judicious and enlightened divine, is, "That all our salvation is originally of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus;" and if, in his "*Checks to Antinomianism*," he found it necessary to support his second axiom, by the authority of Christ's declaration, of believers' final justification by their words or works (Matthew, xii. 37.) Or for the same purpose, alluding to St James's assertion that "Abraham was justified by works" (Chap. 2. ver. 21,) it must be remembered, that if these passages stand at all connected with the gospel-plan of salvation, it is by their evidence, and not by their intrinsic merit, they operate to the justification of the character in question.

It is indeed not without feelings of regret, that the author feels himself called upon, by a sense of duty, to animadvert on the writings of such men as Mr Wesley and Mr Fletcher were. But when it is considered, first, that both these venerable divines sometimes had different views of the same subject: and, secondly, that they themselves always contended for the christian liberty of private judgment, it is hoped that the author will escape the censure of presumption, in endeavouring to trace out the precise line of truth on these controverted points. The heat of the controversy to which these Minutes once gave rise is now subsided, and we may coolly and impartially examine their merits, without transgressing the boundaries of christian liberty. The Minutes alluded to run thus:

"To raise a bulwark against Antinomianism, the following propositions respecting doctrine, were now agreed to:

"Take heed to your doctrine. We said, in 1744, we have leaned too much towards Calvinism.—Wherein? 1. With regard to man's faithfulness, our Lord himself taught us to use the expression. And we ought never to be ashamed of it. We ought steadily to assert, on his authority, that if a man is not faithful in the unrighteous mammon, God will not give him the true riches. 2. With regard to working for life.—This also our Lord has expressly commanded us. Labour (ἐργαζεσθε,) literally, work for the meat that endureth to everlasting life. And in fact, every believer, till he comes to glory, works for, as well as from life. 3. We have received it as a maxim, "that a man is to do nothing in order to justification:" nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favour with God, should cease from evil, and learn to do well. So God himself teaches by the Prophet Isaiah. Whoever repents should do works meet for repentance. And if this is not in order to find favour, what does he do them for?

"Review the whole affair. 1. Who of us is now accepted of God?

He that now believes in Christ with a loving and obedient heart. 2. But who among those that never heard of Christ? He that feareth God and worketh righteousness, according to the light he has. 3. Is this the same with "he that is sincere?" Nearly, if not quite.

"4. Is not this "salvation by works?" Not by the merit of works, but by works, as a condition. 5. What have we then been disputing about for these thirty years? I am afraid, about words (namely, in some of the foregoing instances.) 6. As to merit itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid, we are rewarded according to our works, yea, because of our works. How does this differ from *for the sake of our works?* And how differs this from *secundum merita operum*, as our works deserve? Can you split this hair? I doubt I cannot.

"7. The grand objection to one of the preceding propositions, is drawn from matter of fact. God does in fact justify those who, by their own confession, neither feared God nor wrought righteousness. Is this an exception to the general rule? It is a doubt whether God makes any exception at all. But how are we sure that the person in question never did fear God and work righteousness? His own saying so is not proof: for we know how all that are convinced of sin, undervalue themselves in every respect.

"8. Does not talking of a justified or sanctified state, tend to mislead men? Almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? Whereas, we are every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to our works. According to the whole of our inward tempers, and outward behaviour."*

* Notwithstanding, in the letter which forms the introduction, Mr Wesley states, that these propositions do not refer to the condition of obtaining, but of continuing in the favour of God; yet, we must observe, that they appear to be necessarily and inseparably connected with the former; and as no limitation of them to the latter was expressed in their original introduction, they

To the first of these propositions, a strong objection appears to arise. The making "faithfulness in the unrighteous mammon" the condition upon which the communication of the true riches is suspended, would appear to militate against the genuine terms of the gospel; which all centre in that gracious declaration, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It is here said, that "we ought steadily to assert, on our Lord's authority, that if a man is not faithful in the unrighteous mammon, God will not give him the true riches." If our Lord has indeed asserted this, it is plain all further discussion of the question is superseded; it is something more than absurd, it is impious to argue against the positive assertion of Jesus Christ, upon a point of either speculative, or practical divinity. But the previous question is, has our Lord actually asserted this? And in replying to this question, we trust we shall be able to shew, first, that this principle being incompatible with the terms of salvation held out in the gospel of Christ, and also contradicted in many notorious instances by matter of fact, cannot be true. Secondly, that our Lord in the passages alluded to, had no intention of establishing such a principle as a fundamental doctrine in his gospel, but a widely different design, and that in point of fact he has asserted no such thing. And, thirdly, that if it were true, it would cut off ninety-nine sinners out of a hundred from the possibility of salvation!

But before we proceed, it will be necessary to define what is to be understood by the words "faithful in the unrighteous mammon." Without doubt this implies, in the first place, a conscientious and accurate discharge of every pecuniary engagement; and, in the second place, an uniform dedication of our remaining pro-

have been, and still are considered as the terms of obtaining the favour of God, as well as retaining that divine blessing; and in this point of view we must therefore consider them.

perty to the supply of our own real necessities, and those of our dependants; and, thirdly, the faithful application of the overplus to the purposes of charity and piety, with a single eye to the glory of God in all things. This is the sum of what Mr Wesley has properly described as the true use of money, in his sermon on that important point, from Luke, xvi. 9. This, therefore, is a fair standard whereby to fix the meaning which he intended should be conveyed by those words and which, in fact, they naturally contain. But the words, as they were uttered by our Lord, have a retrospective allusion, being expressed in the past tense: "If ye have not been faithful in the mammon of unrighteousness."† This faithfulness, therefore, in order to render it eligible to be the condition of salvation, must have been uniform, constant, and perfect; otherwise the censure of unfaithfulness cannot be escaped.

But I have asserted that this principle is incompatible with the terms of salvation held out in the gospel of Christ. And indeed this is so plain, that to attempt to cite all the passages which prove it, would be to transcribe a great part of St Paul's Epistles, and not a small portion of Mr Wesley's own writings. A few must therefore suffice. In Acts, xiii. 38. 39. we read: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." For that law required adequate satisfaction for every offence; "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, value for value." But the gospel of Christ proclaims a plenitude of mercy not to the righteous and just; but to the chief of sinners, to the unjust, and unholy, to penitent thieves, robbers, adulterers, or murderers! And again in Romans, iii. 20. 23. "Therefore, by the deeds of the

† Luke, xvi. 11.

law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets: even the righteousness of God which is by faith unto all, and upon all that believe; for there is no difference." It is no matter, let the sins which were committed by the party have been of a pecuniary, or any other nature, this is of no consequence, all are forgiven to the penitent believer; for it is "not by works of righteousness which he hath done, but by mercy, that Jesus hath saved him," and he has obtained "redemption through the blood of Christ; even the forgiveness of all his sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians, i. 7.) These texts are quite sufficient to establish the point; for they prove the communication of the true riches to believers, without any allusion whatever to "faithfulness in the unrighteous mammon." Nor does St Paul once mention this, as the condition of obtaining grace, throughout his whole Epistles. It is therefore not reconcileable with the principles of the gospel, as promulgated by that illustrious herald of salvation, whom we may safely venture to take for our standard.

If we examine the evangelical writings of Mr Wesley, and particularly where he treats of justification by faith alone, we shall find many of his sentiments on those occasions, happily at variance with the unfavourable construction which the expressions of this minute seems to admit. In these truly apostolical passages, Mr Wesley uniformly inculcates the great and essential doctrines of the grace of God, which offers a full and a free salvation to all mankind, yea, to the chief of sinners; not excepting THIEVES and ROBBERS, any more than murderers and adulterers, through the medium of repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and without the slightest intimation that previous faithfulness in the unrighteous mammon, was an indispensable condition of their acceptance with God; or, what is the same thing, that all bankrupts, unfortunate

and insolvent debtors, spendthrifts. and criminals executed for frauds and robberies, are excluded from the possibility of salvation! Yet these latter sentiments are the plain and indubitable language of the Minutes; in direct opposition, we fear, to the truth which declares, that "Christ died the just for the unjust, that he might bring them to God."

But it is not in principles and doctrines alone, that we find a refutation of this Anti-evangelical sentiment. Matter of fact, and that derived from, and sanctioned by the highest possible authority, adds the weight of its irresistible evidence, against the harsh and unpleasing assertion. Let us select two eminent instances from the inspired writings. Behold the dying thief on the cross:—In this wretched sinner you see an accumulation of guilt; and among the rest stands pre-eminent, his great unfaithfulness in the unrighteous mammon. All his life long he manifested not the slightest inclination to faithfulness in that point, and now it is completely out of his power. The judge of quick and dead, that immutable being with whom is no variableness, or shadow of changing, is in his view; and this awful judge, who is truth itself, is supposed to have made an unalterable decree, to have passed an irrevocable sentence, which entirely excludes this dying wretch from every prospect, yea, from the slightest hope of salvation! What must he do? Must he inevitably perish? Yes, if such a sentence had ever escaped the lips of the blessed Jesus, perish he inevitably would; for Jesus saves no man by falsifying his own solemn declarations. But what saith the sinner? "Lord, remember me when thou cometh into thy kingdom." And what saith Jesus? "Verily I say unto thee, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise!" So then, Jesus Christ actually gave to this man the true riches, notwithstanding his glaring and attrocious unfaithfulness in the unrighteous mammon!

The next instance which presents itself, is that of Onesimus. This man, it appears from the sacred history, had robbed his master Philemon, and ran away from him. St. Paul, who knew Philemon, and probably had also seen Onesimus at his house on former occasions, met with this fugitive robber at Rome, and became the happy instrument of his conversion. St. Paul bears ample testimony that God had bestowed upon him the true riches, notwithstanding his flagrant violation of the Eighth Commandment; the apostle himself kindly undertaking to repay to Philemon the loss he had sustained by the unfaithfulness of his slave. And will not the blessed Jesus, who hath all power both in heaven and earth; whose bowels of compassion yearn with inextinguishable pity over the wretched sons of men; who hath already paid the price of his own blood as an atonement for the sins of the world, will he not rather pay both the temporal and spiritual debts of a penitent sinner, than suffer him to perish for his past unfaithfulness, or present insolvency: yes, if he determines to sustain his glorious character of an omnipotent and infallible saviour!

But instances of this kind are not limited to the apostolic age of the world; they crowd upon our experience in every direction. Where is the city or town, where the gaol or prison in the British dominions, which has not occasionally witnessed the triumph of mercy over the doctrine of this minute, in the salvation of penitent thieves? And to bring the matter home to us as Methodists, let me ask any preacher in the connexion, if he were called upon to visit a poor, dying, penitent thief; or an insolvent debtor on his death-bed; or a public robber, about to offer up his life as an atonement to the injured laws of his country; would you venture to address to any of these unfortunate characters, the language and sentiment of the Minute? Would you say to him: "You have been notoriously unfaithful in the unrighteous mammon, and I am bound

by my principles, "steadily to assert on our Lord's authority," that God will never give the true riches of his grace to any such character. Your case is hard, but there is no remedy; you are destitute of that faithfulness which is the indispensable condition of salvation, and you must perish in your sins, there is no mercy for you!" *

Is there a man in the Methodist connexion whose head or whose heart would suffer him to use such language to a dying sinner? Surely not! But rather you would say unto him in the true language of gospel grace; "Come, for all things are now ready! Come to Jesus, and receive a full and a free salvation, without money, and without price! Jesus hath borne all your sins in his own body on the tree, come believe on him, with thy heart unto righteousness, and he will give you true evangelical repentance; wash your guilty soul in his own blood, and impart a clear and indisputable title to a seat at God's right hand, where true pleasures abound for evermore!" And, my brother, if such would be your evangelical practice, how will you vindicate your tacit approbation of that minute, which stands to this day an unreproved monument of that excess of zeal, which once bore us over the sea of controversy, "from the edge of Antinomianism," into the very gulph of Pharisaic self-righteousness?

From the preceding considerations, it is not assuming too much to say, that previous faithfulness in the unrighteous mammon,

* Could it be a conviction of the truth of the principle contained in the minute, operating upon Mr Wesley's mind, that induced him so long to resist the importunate and repeated request of the late unfortunate Dr Dodd, to visit him when under sentence of death, for forgery? Did he really believe, that because the Doctor was about to pay the forfeit of his life to the injured laws of his country, for his "unfaithfulness in the unrighteous mammon," that therefore there was no hope of salvation for that unfortunate gentleman? Yes, Mr Wesley must have held this direful sentiment, if he retained the principles contained in this minute.

mon, is not an indispensable condition upon which salvation is suspended under the gospel dispensation. And are we not here constrained to admit, that Mr Wesley's usual penetration and accuracy appears to have strangely forsaken him on this occasion*; otherwise we can scarcely account for his selecting so precarious a passage as this is, for the establishment of the important doctrine of man's faithfulness, as necessary to salvation. For assuredly, if such faithfulness be any where enjoined and required in the gospel, it is faithfulness to grace after conversion, as essential to perseverance, without which apostacy must ensue. But faithfulness to the law of works before conversion, blessed be God, forms no part of the condition upon which the gift of grace is suspended; nor will any man, who knows his own heart, venture to rest his hopes of salvation upon any such foundation.

But as to the faithfulness even of believers, which is, however, quite a different thing from that here insisted upon, but even with respect to the faithfulness of true believers, in the exercise and improvement of the grace of God freely bestowed upon them,—it may be worth our while to inquire if this is requisite in absolute perfection to the salvation of their souls? Who among us can lay claim to this, or who will venture to repose any portion of his hopes of salvation upon this basis? We hear our people continually (and no doubt truly and justly,) complaining of their great

* It is with sincere regret that the author feels himself compelled thus to controvert the doctrine of so great and good a man as Mr Wesley. But he dare not sacrifice the truth of God to support the reputation of any man upon earth. If Mr Wesley was here in an error, his successors should do what he would have done had he lived to be convinced of it, namely, acknowledge and retract it. If he is right, let the same persons reply to the above observations, and vindicate the minute. Till this is done let no invidious reflections be cast upon the author's presumption or arrogance; these are not the motives which influence his conduct.

unfaithfulness, but we find few willing to say much of their faithfulness. And indeed, if we consider the extensive and comprehensive circle which this word embraces in its range, taking in the entire scope of active and passive obedience, throughout a believer's heart and life, there is reason to believe it would not be very safe for our best characters to assume much upon this point. Faithfulness to grace is, without doubt, a great and important duty, one which cannot be too strongly inculcated, or too zealously practised, as in all probability the degree of our eternal felicity is suspended upon this very point. But if the invariable perfection of this be essentially necessary to salvation, how many of our really pious people, by their own confession, would forfeit their title? What, in particular, would become of all those, who with Mr Charles Wesley could truly sing the following lines:

Weary of wandering from my God,
And now made willing to return,
I hear, and bow me to the rod,
For thee, not without hope, I mourn;
I have an advocate above,
A friend before the throne of love.

O Jesus, full of truth and grace,
More full of grace than I of sin,
Yet once again I seek thy face,
Open thine arms and take me in;
And freely my backslidings heal,
And love the *faithless* sinner still.

Are we not encouraged to hope and believe, that even those characters are, through the tender mercy of God, still eligible to salvation? Most certainly: they have still an unquestionable claim upon the mercy of God through the merits of Christ, and an indefeasible right to acceptance through his prevailing intercession,

by faith in his blood. And can a believer safely rest his acceptance upon any other foundation?—We believe not. While, therefore, believers in Christ are exhorted to diligence and faithfulness in all means of grace, and in dedication of their persons and talents to the glory of God, is it not necessary to guard them against relying on their fidelity in these duties, for their continuance in the favour of God. Is it not necessary to inform them, that although unfaithfulness, if unrepented of, will endanger their salvation, yet all their supposed or real faithfulness will avail nothing towards conciliating the divine mind, or rendering God propitious to their souls, unless it be offered upon the altar of faith in the Son of God, sprinkled with the merit of his atoning blood, and perfumed with the incense of his perfect and immaculate righteousness?

But here it will be naturally inquired, if the doctrine inculcated by the minute is not the true doctrine taught by Jesus Christ, what do his words imply? What is their real meaning and import? The answer to this question, is the second point proposed to be considered. And if a plain man is suffered with modesty and deference to state his opinion of the true meaning and design of our blessed Lord in this controverted passage, it shall be cheerfully submitted to the public eye. But before we proceed directly to the discussion of the point, let us attend to one or two preliminary observations.

In the first place, let it be remembered that our blessed Lord, in his discourses with the Jews, seldom attempted to develope the abstruse doctrines of redemption in his blood, and the plenitude of that salvation which would ultimately flow from this inexhaustible fountain to the believers in his name. The proper period was not yet arrived, neither were the minds of the Jews, nor even those of his own disciples yet prepared for a full discovery of these deep and important mysteries. (This is evident from John, iii. 11. 12. and chap. xvi. 12. and many other passages.) Our blessed Lord

therefore in his addresses to the Jews, suited his discourses to their capacities, and to the state of mind they were then in, to prepare them for the reception of the evangelical truths of his gospel, when, after his own glorification and the penticostal descent of the holy spirit, it should be preached in its native purity and divine power. Secondly, a very moderate degree of attention will convince us also that when our Lord entered into an argument with any of the Jews, he generally took them up on their own principles, and on that ground he refuted their false positions, and confounded their futile expectations of obtaining the favour of God, and the reward of eternal life, by the deeds of the law, upon their supposed conformity to which, in conjunction with their descent from Abraham, we know those Pharisees rested their hopes of eternal life. The futility of these hopes, arising from the deep hypocrisy and desperate wickedness of their hearts, our Saviour labours continually to expose; if haply these self-righteous Pharisees, but eggregious sinners, might thereby be induced to abandon their false foundations, and seek redemption in the precious blood of a crucified Saviour, even the forgiveness of all their sins.

Now, the more closely we examine the passage in question, the more fully shall we be satisfied and confirmed in judgment, that on this occasion our blessed Lord, far from declaring the conditions upon which a penitent sinner, under the gospel dispensation, shall obtain mercy, was combating and exposing the false and untenable grounds upon which the Jews cherished their hopes of eternal happiness, and shewing the natural impossibility of their making good such a claim. Let us attend to the scope of the argument, and we shall clearly discover this to be the design of our Lord. It is recorded in St Luke's Gospel, chap. xvi. and preceded by the parable of the Unjust Steward, with which the subsequent discourse stands connected. And from this our Lord takes occasion to reprove the

covetousness of the Pharisees, who then formed a part of his audience. Reasoning, therefore, on principles purely natural, Jesus said to them (ver. 10, &c.) "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." If, therefore, YE have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to YOUR trust, the true riches? And if YE have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give YOU that which is your own?"

It is really matter of astonishment, how so many able commentators as have written on this passage of scripture, should so far mistake the design of our Lord therein, as they appear to have done. Taking it, as they generally have, for a declaration of the terms upon which a penitent sinner is to obtain mercy, under the dispensation of grace, they have been beyond measure perplexed in their endeavours to force it into a coincidence with the genuine principles of the gospel. Following this beaten track, Mr Henry (cited by Mr Fletcher in his Vindication,) labours exceedingly to prove, that because a man has been an unfaithful steward of the good things of this life before his conversion, he will infallibly be equally unfaithful to the riches of grace, after his conversion! A position this, which, if true, would tear up by the roots the fundamental principles of the christian religion; deprive the children of God of the glorious privileges of their new birth; and render the operations of grace, and the influences of the holy spirit, perfectly nugatory and unavailing! "But our Lord asserts this fact, therefore it must be true!" Does he indeed? Nay, he asserts no such thing. He asserts indeed (and upon natural principles, but upon them only, the conclusions he draws are most just and true,) that the Jews, to whom his discourse was addressed, being carnal, sensual, and devilish, and destitute of his redeeming grace, were in that state incapable of being entrusted with the things which per-

tained unto the kingdom of God, because they would infallibly abuse the most excellent gifts which God could bestow upon them to their own condemnation, and the dishonour of God; of this, in fact, the most melancholy proofs are on record, respecting the highly favoured, but most ungrateful ancestors of this very people, when God once committed to their care all the treasures of his kingdom then upon earth. And our Lord, who saw and knew the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of their hearts, well knew, they were the legitimate children of their treacherous and faithless parents. Indeed, he had told them but a short time before, they were of their father the devil, for his works they did! And, therefore, even those spiritual riches which they already possessed, but which they had abused and forfeited, were now about to be taken out of their hands, and given in still richer abundance to the Gentiles; who, embracing the offers of salvation by faith in the rejected Messiah of the Jews, should, *by the regeneration of his spirit*, be rendered faithful stewards of those mysteries of God, which the angels desire to look into, but which the faithless and unbelieving Jews had rejected with scorn and contempt.

In short, from the evident scope of this argument, it appears that the entire passage may with the utmost propriety and advantage be thus paraphrased, as expressive of the real design and genuine meaning of these words, as though Jesus had said: "Every tree is known by its fruits. It is a fixed principle, founded on reason, and confirmed by experience, that all the actions of a man partake of the general spirit which governs his conduct. Consequently, one who acts under the influence of an unjust and dishonest principle in a small matter, will inevitably act in the same manner if entrusted with concerns of higher importance; for his selfish and dishonest heart will be uniform in its motions, and true to its principles, and will always betray the trust reposed in it;

and more especially when presented with an opportunity of gratifying its cupidity at the expence of religion. You, Pharisees, are of this description ; I know the covetousness and hypocrisy of your hearts ; your external professions of piety cannot deceive me ; my grace, indeed, could and would change your hearts, if ye would embrace and cherish it, but ye reject and despise both me and it: I am therefore constrained to reason with you on your own principles ; to judge you by your own law ; and to treat you as incorrigible and unchangeable sinners. And therefore to intrust you with the unsearchable riches of my mercy and love, would only be to cast pearls before swine, and would terminate in the dishonour of my grace, and your own greater condemnation. Your pride, your obstinacy, and your unbelief, are unconquerable, and you must, because you will perish in your sins; and where I am you cannot come. On the other hand, it is equally true, that a man acting under the influence of regenerating grace will be faithful to every trust reposed in him. The same principle which operates in him to induce a faithful and conscientious disposal of the minor riches of this world, produces that fidelity to the greater and more desirable riches of grace and holiness, which is the mark of a new-birth, and proves the sincerity and uprightness of the heart from which it flows."

That this, and this only, was the true design and meaning of our Lord, in this remarkable passage, will appear evident to every unprejudiced mind, and particularly when taken in conjunction with the context; for, by verse 14, we find "the Pharisees who were covetous," took the words as applied to themselves, "and derided him."* And Jesus said unto them : "Ye are they which

* It appears that from verse 10, our Lord particularly addressed himself to the Pharisees who surrounded him, and not to his own disciples, for he

justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts, for that which is esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Therefore, ye are the proper objects of my present discourse, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every truly enlightened man is pressing into it; but in rejecting me, ye divest yourselves of all right and title to the privileges of my gospel, by the terms of which, ye might obtain redemption and salvation; but since ye choose to cleave to the law, by that law ye shall be judged, and this law condemns and deprives you of the possibility of salvation upon your own principles." Or, as he saith in effect on other occasions: "He that believeth on me is passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation, but hath redemption in my blood, the forgiveness of all his sins, however great their enormity, or however deep their pollution; but ye hypocrites, ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell? Seeing ye reject both my person and offices, by which alone a man can now find access to God?"

Seeing then, it appears, that the sole design of our Lord in this passage, was to refute Pharisaic principles, to demonstrate their incompetency to support the claim of their advocates upon the foundation of personal righteousness to eternal life, and consequently to confound their futile hopes; is it not cause of regret, that the words were ever taken up by Mr Wesley in the sense which is affixed to them in the minutes? Where they stand as an insurmountable barrier in the way of the salvation of all penitent bankrupts, insolvent persons, thieves, and robbers, under the gospel dispensation; all of whom (although some of their crimes may be

had recently addressed very different language to them, when he said (chap. xii. 32.) "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

great,) have beyond all controversy, as just and fair a claim upon the redemption that is in Jesus, as the most self-righteous Pharisee in the land, who may actually pay all his just debts, even to the "tything of mint, anise, and cummin," and yet be as far from the inward kingdom of God, as the most flagrant sinner upon earth.

We trust no reasonable man will attempt to apply the preceding observations, as militating against the principle of moral honesty. Such an imputation would be equally unjust and illiberal, and would betray either the ignorance or malice of its author. The principle of moral honesty is most honourable to human nature, it is essential to salvation, and every true christian wishes to encourage and cherish it in both converted and unconverted men, although it may be questioned if it can radically exist in the heart of the latter. But the error lies in laying this as the foundation of a sinner's acceptance with God, and that not only in the principle, but the practice also, and in its fullest state of perfection! The assertion that "faithfulness in the unrighteous mammon," is the condition upon which the justification of a sinner is suspended, is where the error, the dangerous error appears to lie, an assertion involving a contradiction in terms, and diametrically opposed, as hath already been shewn, to the genuine principles of the gospel, and to the constant experience of the children of God in all ages!

For I have said, and am ready to maintain my position (which is the third point for consideration,) "that if the doctrine contained in this minute were true, it would cut off ninety-nine sinners out of a hundred from the possibility of salvation." This will clearly appear by giving the full and authorised latitude already ascribed to the indefinite phrase, "Faithful in the unrighteous mammon;" comprehending at least, all that Mr Wesley has described in his sermon already alluded to "On the Use of Money," and including the constant, uniform, and conscientious dedication of all our substance

to the glory of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures. Less than this deserves not the name of faithfulness. And it is certain that actions, however fair and disinterested they may appear in the eyes of men, derive all their value in the sight of God from the principles and motives which give them birth. Therefore the faithfulness which would be necessary to offer up to a pure and heart-searching God, as the meritorious condition of salvation, should be perfect, cordial, and spiritual; which is incompatible with the slightest tincture of coveteousness, for this is both spiritual idolatry, and spiritual thievery. The man who covets his neighbour's property, would steal it if a fair opportunity presented itself, and a thief in heart is, in God's estimation, a thief in practice, as sure as "he that hateth his brother is a murderer."* Now shew me, I will not say one man in a hundred, but one unconverted man in the British empire, who can boast that he is able to bring his inward and outward faithfulness and integrity to the scrutinizing test of the law of God, and to pass it with the judge of quick and dead, as a spotless condition of his obtaining the riches of eternal life. If such a one should start up and lay claim to the promised reward, we must set aside his vain pretensions by quoting to him the truly evangelical sentiment of the Rev. John Wesley, found in his excellent sermon on "The Lord our Righteousness." With an orthodoxy of doctrine worthy of St Paul, the enlightened and illustrious divine cries out, "All believers are both forgiven and accepted not for the sake of any thing in them, or of any thing that ever was, that is, or ever can be done by them, but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for them;" and again, "the righteousness of Christ is the whole and sole foundation of all our hope." And if any one asserts that the controverted minute

* John, First Epistle, iii. 15.

came from the same head and heart, which dictated those evangelical truths, I reply we must then appeal from Mr Wesley, when hurried or heated by controversy, and by his zeal against Antinomianism, to the same venerable divine, who, when cool and free from prejudice and irritation, penned the important truths of that celebrated sermon.

To conclude: If the preceding observations are founded in fact, it is evident we cannot conscientiously maintain this controverted minute as a standard principle in the doctrine of Methodism; for it is truth, and not the opinion of any one man, which must constitute the basis of that sacred fabric. Ought it not then to be abandoned as untenable? In expunging it, we may indeed confess that we do not believe Mr Wesley's judgment was infallible; but this will not impeach his character as a faithful, upright, and conscientious minister. To err is the lot of humanity, and to amend our errors on their discovery is a duty we owe to ourselves, to the public, and to the cause of God in which we are engaged. To refuse to do this is to declare that the pride of our own reputation is dearer to us than the interests of the church of God. Mr Wesley's integrity as a faithful and upright minister, would have compelled him to have rescinded this minute had he lived to be convinced of its inconsistency with the truth of the gospel. The leading men of his connexion are under the same obligation to God, to the public, and to their own consciences. It remains therefore that they either prove my arguments false and groundless, or expunge the minute from the annals of Methodism; or finally, retain it with a conviction that it is a false position, and incompatible with the truth as it is in Jesus*.

* Possibly some farther attempt may be made to defend the doctrine of this minute, in reply to the preceding observations; but it is hard to con-

The next proposition, recorded in these minutes, regards a believer's working for, as well as from a principle of life. It runs thus, "With regard to working for life. This also our Lord has expressly commanded us. Labour (ἐργαζεσθε,) literally, work for the meat which endureth to everlasting life. And in fact every believer till he comes to glory, works for, as well as from life."

Understanding by this proposition, simply, that it is the duty and

ceive on what grounds this can be done, after the ingenuous vindication of Mr Fletcher, unless it be by changing the sense of the words, and conjecturing that Mr Wesley meant something very different from what is expressed. But in reply to this it must be observed, that a supposition of this kind is too degrading to Mr Wesley to be either pleaded or admitted. It is incompatible with his well-known accuracy of expression on such occasions; besides, Mr Fletcher in his Vindication, takes up the words in precisely the same sense that they are here taken in, and as he did this under Mr Wesley's eye, and doubtless with his approbation, it is evident that was the true and legitimate sense which the author intended to fix upon them. But it is humbly submitted, that Mr Fletcher's Vindication, great and able as it is, does not obviate any of the objections above urged. Nor is this to be wondered at; for it is evident that the faithfulness described in the minute, is thereby required to exist before conversion, and to be brought forward as the condition of obtaining the grace of conversion. A position which no human ingenuity can ever reconcile to the gospel-plan of salvation; for where does the scripture require, or once hint at any faithfulness to be found in an unregenerate sinner, as the condition of his acceptance with God? The very mention of this involves a complete solecism in religious argument; and the thing itself is a *nonentity* in practical and experimental religion. For it is plain, that no knave will ever become an honest man till grace makes him such; nor can faithfulness in any duty towards God be found in the heart or life of any man, until the true riches of converting grace establishes it there. To lay down faithfulness, therefore, as the condition of conversion, is as absurd in principle, as it is impossible in practice. And hence, we cannot but sincerely regret that Mr Wesley, in his laudable attempt to establish the necessity of a believer's faithfulness to the grace of God in his heart, as essential to salvation, unhappily stumbled upon an imaginary faithfulness in the heart and life of an unconverted sinner, as the great condition of his acceptance with God! Let the wisdom, candour, and piety of the present Methodists, for the honour of their principles, remove this stumbling-block out of the way.

practice of every true believer in Christ, to exert his spiritual and corporal powers, in the means ordained of God for his increase in holiness, and in love to God and man; there can be no question either as to its truth or importance in the church of Christ. The same divine principle is constantly inculcated in the apostolic epistles, and illustrated in the hearts and lives of the children of God in every age and country. From these, therefore, of whatever profession, it can have no hostility to encounter; for the grand fundamental principle of the gospel of Christ is secured by the admission, that although a believer works for life, yet that work is sustained by the powerful influence of that heaven-born principle which is imparted in the new birth to every child of God, and which is the germ, the pledge, and the foretaste of eternal life.

But if, under the general phrase, *working for life*, there lurked an insinuation either that the natural powers of man were singly adequate to work out the salvation of the soul,—or that there was any thing so meritorious in the works of a believer, as to enable him to claim the reward of eternal life upon their intrinsic value, detached from the imputation of the merits of Christ to his soul: then indeed it would become the duty of every christian firmly to resist such an insinuation, however high the authority from whence it proceeded, because it would be subversive of the genuine and fundamental doctrines of the christian religion. This indeed was the light in which the proposition was viewed by the Calvinists of that day, who entered their protest against it. But although owing to the conciseness of the expressions, the terms are somewhat ambiguous, and therefore susceptible of a more unfavourable interpretation; yet in justice to Mr Wesley's well-known sentiments so amply expressed on other occasions, we cannot ascribe to this proposition any other meaning than that contained in the preceding paragraph. Mr Fletcher's vindication of this minute, is able and

God's approbation of a believer's works is a different thing. This is, however, the necessary consequence of a true faith, however low or weak in its degree; for it is always accompanied with suitable fruits, among which repentance unto life standeth foremost. For, certain it is, that no man ever yet repented of his sins, who did not previously believe that God is, and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. If therefore, we hear a self-condemned sinner crying out with the Philippian jailor, "what must I do to be saved?" let us not direct him to the law of works, and bid him recover the divine favour, by "ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well," before regeneration has enabled him to do either to any effectual purpose: but let us, with St Paul, point him to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, and cry to him as the apostle to the jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"

Surely in an unhappy hour was this proposition, thus insulated and detached from all connexion with faith in the Son of God, enrolled in the records of Methodism as a standard truth of the gospel of Christ. For God's sake, and for the sake of precious souls, either let some explanatory and amending clause be attached to it, or otherwise expunge it entirely from the annals of Methodism. But if it must remain, if its antiquity successfully pleads for its permanency, let us seek for some method whereby unregenerate sinners may learn to give such a legal perfection to their works, as will insure to them from that source a title to the favour of God: our practice and our doctrine will then harmonise, but it will be in the subversion of the gospel-plan of salvation!

One cannot but wonder what kind of sentiments they were, which Mr Wesley informs us were so fashionable and prevalent among the Methodists prior to the promulgation of the doctrine contained in this minute, and which, it seems, it was intended to

correct. Did they then imagine that neither faith nor repentance were necessary before justification? Or did they suppose, merely, that although these were necessary antecedents to the pardon of sin, yet they must not be conceived to be the procuring cause of that blessing? From the extreme conciseness and ambiguity of the expressions, it is difficult to ascertain which of these was the real opinion of the Methodists of that day. But from the writings of Mr Wesley himself prior to that period, we have the most indubitable evidence that he both believed and taught the absolute necessity of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as conditions of justification; and that works meet for repentance should testify the depth and sincerity of that repentance *. And we know that Mr Wesley's opinions then nearly governed the minds of both preachers and people. What then are we to understand by the confession of Mr Wesley, that both he and his preachers had "received it as a maxim that a man is to do nothing *in order to* justification?" It would appear that the mystery lies in those three words in italics, "in order to." The true meaning of these otherwise doubtful words, is fixed in the latter clause of the controverted proposition, where they evidently imply an efficacious procuring cause. They mean, in plain English, the meritorious cause, for the sake of which the favour of God is bestowed on those who perform them: and this is alleged and vindicated as the true and legitimate design with which they are performed.

But this sentiment can no more comport with the solemn declaration of Mr Wesley himself on another occasion, than with the general doctrine of the gospel. For as has been already cited, he

* Witness, to mention no more, the Rules of the Methodist Society, which are almost entirely composed of those works meet for repentance, prior to justification.

expressly declares, that "all believers are both forgiven and accepted, not for the sake of any thing that ever was, that is, or ever can be done by them; but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for them."—*(Sermon on Justification.)*

But the question proposed in the minute now recurs for consideration.—"If the man who repents, and does works meet for repentance, does not this in order to find favour, what does he do them for?" To this I answer, first, it is of very little consequence what he does them for, seeing it is neither his opinions, nor his practice that are to be set up as the standard of evangelical truth. What if the man in question should be as Pharisaical in his spirit as Mr Wesley acknowledges he himself once was; and be actually seeking to reconcile himself to God by the deeds of the law, as both the Mr Wesleys confess they did for a series of years; is this to be urged as a proof that it is right, and agreeable to the gospel-plan of salvation?—Surely not! But, "what does he do them for?" I answer, secondly, if he is truly enlightened, he cannot, he dare not do them with the intention, or the hope of thereby obtaining remission of sins, or reconciliation with God; for that would be to assume to himself the character of his own mediator with God, and to place his paltry, insignificant, and sin-polluted works, in the stead of the meritorious blood and righteousness of Christ: whereas, it was God himself who was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; he being made a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in and through him. But "what does he do them for?" To this I reply, in the third and last place, if his mind be enlightened, and directed by the spirit of God, he does them because a mixture of fear, and hope, and desire, constrains him to hasten out of the path of destruction and disobedience; and out of this he cannot go one step, without taking that step, in the path of obedience to the will of God, and which leads

to life eternal, but still his steps are as yet so wavering and unstable, that he dare not presume to build his hopes of acceptance on so fickle a foundation. In this situation, the man can justly adopt the language of Mr Charles Wesley, and sing with him:

I work, and own the labour vain;
And thus from works I cease;
I strive, and see my fruitless pain,
Till God create my peace.

Fruitless, till thou thyself impart,
Must all my efforts prove;
They cannot change a sinful heart,
They cannot purchase love.

I do the thing thy laws enjoin,
And then the strife give o'er
To thee I then the whole resign,
I trust in means no more.

I trust in him who stands between
The Father's wrath and me.
Jesu, thou great, eternal mean,
I look for all from thee!

The truly pious and venerable Mr Fletcher, faithful to the calls of friendship. and anxious to rescue his aged fellow-labourer from the triumphs of his enemies, exhausted his ingenuity to frame some kind of an apology for this proposition. A vindication it can hardly be called. As the thing itself is most perfectly legal, and exactly suited to the Jewish dispensation, Mr Fletcher found himself necessitated to draw upon the Mosaic institutions, and the records of Jewish piety, for the principal part of those materials of which his apology is composed. His affection, his friendship, and his piety, none can call in question, and in apologising for this minute, it certainly was not his place to point out its defects. But had he chanced to have taken up the other side of this argument, and to

have written against the proposition instead of for it, methinks we should have had a very different display of his polemical talents on the occasion. And indeed when a person of ability is determined to support a question of legality upon scriptural authority, by citing only those passages which make for his cause, it is amazing how much may be said for it, with every appearance of truth, particularly out of the Old Testament; but gospel axioms are not to be tried exclusively by the precepts of the Old Testament. Had Mr Fletcher put this proposition fairly into his scripture scales, and weighed it in the balance of the sanctuary, with the weights of evangelical truth, as well as the shackles of the Jewish economy, we should probably have seen a very different account of it. Let the present Methodists supply his lack of service.

It is their indispensable duty to revise and, if found defective, to correct whatever stands upon record among them as fundamental principles of religion; and more especially what concerns the interesting and important question of a sinner's acceptance with God, and restoration to the divine favour. Upon this delicate subject we cannot be too critically exact. The smallest shade of distinction should be accurately defined, for in no part of experimental divinity are we more exposed to error, and error of the most dangerous tendency, than in describing the terms of a sinner's reconciliation to God. And most certain it is, that the proposition in question has a direct and insuperable tendency, as it now stands, to divert the attention of a penitent sinner from the atonement and mediation of Christ, and direct him to the value and efficacy of his own works, as the medium of his restoration to the favour of God.

It is indeed highly probable that Mr Wesley intended to inculcate no such sentiments as those just described; but, absorbed in the heat of his animosity against Antinomianism, he inadvertently overleaped the boundaries of his own evangelical sentiments: nor could he per-

haps foresee the full effect which such a formidable and decisive battery as he has erected in these minutes, would ultimately have in demolishing some of the tenderest plants of the gospel of Christ, upon which its artillery has unhappily been brought to play. For, beyond all controversy, this third and last proposition goes to establish the principle, that a penitent sinner is capable of performing such works as are adequate to meet and satisfy the demands of the law, to excite the divine approbation, and secure to the performer, on their own intrinsic merit, a restoration to the favour of God, without the slightest allusion to the efficacious atonement and mediation of the great High Priest of our profession. We ask, should such a proposition remain as a detached and fundamental principle of Methodism? It is easy to observe, that the error complained of in this minute does not lie in the doing of those works which are described in it, but in the motives, the object, and design, which are ascribed, justified, and applauded, as the source from whence they spring, and the ends they are destined to attain.

We have now gone through the examination of the three principal propositions contained in the celebrated Minutes of the Methodist Conference of 1770, and the result of that examination has been, that we find the first is founded upon a mistaken idea of our Lord's meaning; that it opposes the plainest truths of the gospel, as taught by St Paul, and by Mr Wesley himself; that it is itself opposed by matter of fact; and, if true, would undermine the whole gospel-plan of redemption, and render the salvation of ninety-nine persons out of a hundred an absolute impossibility. Of the second we have found, that giving it the best and most favourable construction it will admit of, it contains merely a plain and simple fact,

which a rational christian would scarcely ever think of opposing; namely, that the grace of God, or the life of God in the soul of man, is of an operative nature, and susceptible of increase;—that the terms used in it are rather ambiguous from their extreme conciseness; but, that upon the whole, Mr Fletcher's vindication of this proposition was valid and satisfactory. Of the third we could not say so much; it is found to contain principles incompatible with the privileges of penitent believers, and to have a direct tendency to mislead them from an entire and implicit confidence in the merits and mediation of Christ (the only firm foundation of a sinner's hope,) and to induce a false and dangerous confidence in the efficacy of their own works, to entitle them to the favour of God.

We are now invited by the reverend author of the minutes to "REVIEW THE WHOLE AFFAIR." We gladly accept the invitation: "Though error dreads a revisal, truth we know cannot but gain by it!" Then follow the particulars of this REVIEW, consisting first, of five questions, with their answers; and three minor propositions, containing, as is to be supposed, the marrow of the gospel, as believed and taught by Mr Wesley and his preachers. As these have been already quoted at full length, they need not be here repeated. Let us consider them in the order and connexion Mr Wesley has placed them.

"1st. Who of us is now accepted of God?—He that now believes in Christ with a loving and obedient heart." "Excellent answer (saith Mr Fletcher,) worthy of St Paul and St James; for it sums up in one line the epistles of both."—Most readily do I subscribe to the same sentiment; and every Methodist in the kingdom will do the same.

"2d. But who among those who never heard of Christ?—He that feareth God and worketh righteousness, according to the light he has."—Right and good.

"3d. Is this the same with "he that is sincere?—Nearly, if not quite."—Here, as I apprehend, we begin to get into obscurity, and tread on uncertain ground. Is it intended by these words to run a parallel between the case of a heathen who never heard of Christ, and that of an unenlightened man in a christian country, a deist for instance, who, though surrounded with light, yet remains in voluntary darkness, from a sincere conviction that the gospel of Christ is a fable? Yet such a man is sincere and upright in his conduct, according to the light he has. Is it intended to say, that this man stands upon the same footing as to his prospect of salvation, with a heathen who never heard of Christ? Or a Papist: Who is more sincere, more blind, more bigotted, more cruel, or more vicious than the Papist! yet he serves God, not barely with sincerity, but with flaming zeal, "according to the light he has." Is this man salvable by virtue of his sincerity (in murdering heretics for instance,) on the same footing, as pious heathens? We see sincerity is perfectly consistent with a false belief, and with immoral practices; yea, "the time will come, saith our Lord, (and have we not seen it exemplified?) when they who kill you will think (sincerely think,) they do God service!" Is sincerity then an apology for crimes of the greatest enormity? Is it a fair substitute for true faith, for regenerating grace, and for gospel holiness? Surely not. Yet I am afraid we cannot deny that these consequences naturally result from the plain and literal construction of the proposition in question.

If this be the true meaning of the words, and from what follows it appears strongly corroborated, surely the religious world, and particularly the Methodists, have a right to something more than a bare *ipse dixit*, to prove a point of such importance! But if, on the other hand, this is merely a comparison of two branches of natural religion under a heathenish dispensation, then we ask, what

have christians to do with this, and why should these dark and heathenish premises be laid down as a criterion for judging the liberty of christians under the gospel dispensation? Assuredly we are here plunged in the mire of self-righteousness, and enveloped in the night of heathenish darkness! O, why are we left without a key to open the mystery of these dark sentences? Who can reconcile them to the gospel of Christ, or even ascertain if Mr Fletcher has explained the genuine meaning of their author *?

But as though the preceding propositions had been perfectly clear, satisfactory, and conclusive, the minutes proceed to say,

"4th. Is not this salvation by works?—Not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition."

"5th. What have we then been disputing about for these thirty years?—I am afraid about words."

In the four last cited questions, an evident attempt is made to assimilate the terms upon which heathens and infidels are admissible to salvation, with those upon which sinners, under the dispensation of the gospel, may become entitled to eternal life and glory;

* It is very remarkable, and not a little extraordinary, that Mr Fletcher's vindication of these propositions does not appear to have been ever publicly sanctioned by Mr Wesley. The present writer is tolerably well acquainted with Mr Wesley's works, yet he cannot recollect to have ever seen in any part of them even an allusion to that vindication, much less a public testimony of his approbation of it! What conclusions are we to draw from this silence? Did Mr Fletcher's vindication proceed entirely upon conjecture of Mr Wesley's real meaning; and did his affectionate regard for his friend's reputation elicit from his able pen constructions which Mr Wesley could not sanction with a sacred regard to truth, as his own original meaning? And why does Mr Wesley confine his own vindication of these controverted points to a few detached and unsatisfactory sentences in those three sermons alluded to in his letter to Lady ****, inserted at the beginning of this Appendix. It is certain that some passages in those very sermons, far from explaining, appear to controvert and counteract the doctrine of the minutes, and might, by an adversary of no extraordinary talent, be advantageously placed in direct opposition to them.

or rather, to bring the latter down to a level with the former. In pursuance of this design, the plain English of these abstruse sentences appears to be, "Heathens are to be saved, not by faith in Jesus Christ, for they have never heard of his name, and faith we know cometh by hearing; but in consideration of the darkness of their dispensation God, of his infinite mercy and compassion, will admit them to salvation upon their fidelity to the light they are favoured with. If they fear God and work righteousness, accord- to this, they shall be saved." And although it is not expressed, yet we will give the propositions credit for meaning to say also, "that this is not upon the intrinsic merit of their obedience; but that it rests upon the virtue of the great atonement of an unknown Redeemer; by whose efficacious grace (testified by those works which, though not the meritorious cause, are the conditions of their salvation,) upright heathens are saved in their obedience." To this fact, so understood, no reasonable objection can be made. But the next principle which appears to be erected on this foundation, is not of quite so innocent a nature. Its object and design seems to be to assert, "that certain persons living under the christian dispensation, and sitting under the sound of the gospel, are eligible to salvation upon principles similar to those by which heathens are salvable, provided they also are sincere according to the light they have." This would appear to militate against the peculiar glory of the gospel-plan of salvation, and perhaps to supersede the absolute necessity of "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of regeneration, and of holiness, without which we know, none shall see the Lord."

And the conclusion which is deduced from these premises, appears to be no less than that the dispute which had been maintained for thirty preceding years by the Methodist body, respecting the terms of salvation, "whether it was attainable by faith or by works," was a mere strife of words, and was now at an end; it being clearly

ascertained that all men, whatever their religious principles may be, are equally eligible to salvation only through different mediums, viz. Christians, by faith in Christ working by love, and producing obedience: Heathens, by sincere obedience to the light they have: Turks and Jews, doubtless upon the same footing; and finally, sincere and upright unbelievers in christian countries, where the gospel is fully preached, who serve or think they serve God, upon such principles as their own consciences dictate to them as sound and orthodox: but all these agreeing in the proof that salvation is their common privilege, "by works as a condition;" in favour of which principle, the 4th question and answer decides the controversy.

Questioning much if this important subject is susceptible of decision from a mere logical disquisition, we shall not enter into a metaphysical discussion of its merits, but confine ourselves at present to the quotation of a few passages of scripture which, if attended to with simplicity, may possibly cast some light upon the point. After our Lord's resurrection from the dead, he commanded his disciples saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach *the gospel* to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."* Is not salvation here expressly limited to the belief and practice of the gospel? Again, St Paul saith, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *Anathema, Maranatha.*"† And again: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that *obey not the gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with *everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power."‡ And St John expressly

* Mark, xvi. 16.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 22. "Let him be accursed; and the Lord cometh to execute vengeance upon him!"

‡ 2 Thess. i. 7. 8.

declares, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, *shall not see life*, but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

From the testimony of these plain passages of scripture, we are fully assured that in a country where the sound of the gospel is heard, faith in the Son of God, and obedience to the divine precepts of that gospel, are indispensably requisite to salvation; and consequently, that the dispute concerning salvation by faith working by love on the one hand, or by works without faith on the other, is finally and irrevocably determined by God himself in favour of the former; and though "an angel from heaven should preach unto us any other gospel than this,"† we are bound to reject it with indignation and abhorrence! But if the sincerity of an Infidel or of a Papist be admitted as an acceptable substitute for genuine faith and gospel holiness, if the distinctions we have been accustomed to make between these different modes of seeking salvation, be nothing more than a mere λογομαχια, a strife of words, then let us abandon our bibles, and cease to preach the glad tidings of salvation through faith in a crucified Saviour!

It is true Mr Fletcher, in the abundance of his charity, gives a very different colouring to the expressions contained in this minute, from that which is above assumed as its genuine and natural meaning. He will not admit that Mr Wesley could mean, "a carnal unawakened wretch, who boasts of his imaginary sincerity; but one who, in God's account, sincerely and uprightly follows the light of his dispensation." But assuredly Mr Fletcher quite mistook or overlooked the plain meaning of the minute, for that is the sentiment inculcated in the second question, which alone is applicable to heathens. Whereas the third is brought home to our own doors, and evidently relates to the terms of acceptance, of the characters

* John, iii. 36. † Galatians, i. 8. 9.

described as living under the christian dispensation. This is clear from the conclusion drawn from those premises, viz. "What have *we* then been disputing about for the last thirty years?" Had the Methodist preachers in conjunction with Mr Wesley, been all that time disputing about the terms upon which heathens are eligible to salvation?—By no means. The dispute was about the salvation of the people of England, whether this was by faith or by works; and Mr Wesley goes back to the dispensation of heathenism to fetch a proof, that because the subjects of that dispensation were salvable by obedience to the light they had, therefore the people of England who were but "sincere," were equally entitled to salvation, although not possessing true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If this be not the meaning of Mr Wesley, I ask upon what other footing can either the question or the conclusion be brought to bear upon the christian dispensation and upon the doctrines preached in the Methodist chapels? For what have they to do with the salvation of heathens? And is it not evident from Mr Fletcher's very first observation upon it (as above cited,) that this forcibly struck his penetrating mind, as the plain and palpable meaning of the words? Else why so studious to remove that unfavourable impression before any one else had pointed it out to him? And after all, what authority had Mr Fletcher for thus altering the plain sense of the passage? Had he any but the inconsistency of the sentiment with the former writings of his venerable friend? I confess I can see no other; and this is the very point I so sincerely and deeply lament!

Our veneration and respect for the person and authority of Mr Wesley, are justly great, and we would sacrifice almost any thing except a good conscience and the truth of God, in order to support that veneration and respect; but it is plain we cannot follow him any farther than he follows Christ and his apostles, and the man

who dares not maintain the truth of God against the opinion of any other man upon earth who opposes it, proves himself an unfaithful steward of the mysteries of salvation. His reputation, his interest, or his party spirit is his God. But we know the only safe foundation for religious principles is the truth of God, and the scriptures are the only legitimate standard of that truth. If our principles then in any instance deviate from these, that deviation must be corrected, otherwise we build upon the sand, and our edifice will assuredly come down. Happy shall we be if we discover, and gently remove those doctrines which are incompatible with the truth as it is in Jesus; our zeal and fidelity shall not go unrewarded by the great head of the church. But in disguising or defending error, we sap the foundations of our own establishment, and expose ourselves and our principles to the extirpating hand of him who hath declared, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."*

The sixth minor proposition now claims our attention, it runs thus:

"6th. As to merit itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid, we are rewarded according to our works, yea because of our works. How does this differ from, For the sake of our works. And how differs this from *secundum merita operum?* As our works deserve. Can you split this hair?—I doubt I cannot."

The sense which Mr Fletcher has fixed on the term merit, and the scriptures he adduces in favour of the doctrine here inculcated, when taken in that sense, certainly rescues this proposition from much of the obloquy, which otherwise might have attached to the expressions as they stand naked and unguarded before us. Beheld in the evangelical light in which that venerable divine has with equal ability and tenderness placed them, they lose their otherwise

* Matthew, xv. 13.

objectionable aspect, and assume the character of sacred, divine, and important truths. His happy adoption, and opportune introduction, of that truly sublime and evangelical sentiment, which inculcates that the rewardableness of a believer's works is derived from the merit of his great Redeemer, who lives and works in every child of God, while it reflects the highest honour upon the judgment and the principles of its author, obviates many objections which otherwise might have lain against the language of the proposition.

His illustration of this sentiment by the scriptural comparison of Christ to a vine, and his people to the branches, while it gives to Jesus and to his grace, the honour of whatever excellence appears in the works or fruits of his living members, secures to them, on a legitimate and immoveable foundation, the reward due under a covenant of grace, to the loving obedience of every true believer in Christ Jesus. The other parts of the vindication of this proposition are equally able, ingenious, and edifying, and they successfully represent the doctrine therein contained not only as fundamentally true, but as exhibiting the noblest display of the efficacy of that grace, which, while it unites the soul to God, consecrates every affection of the heart, and every action of the life, as an acceptable sacrifice to God, through the mediation of Jesus, and the effectual energy of his holy spirit.

Happy, truly happy is the writer of this, in seeing a fundamental and most important truth thus interwoven with the principles of Methodism, and certainly we cannot but rejoice in the illustration and confirmation it has received from the enlightened advocate who undertook its vindication. Methinks that vindication is worthy of some peculiar mark of approbation and adoption in the Methodist societies; why should it rest upon the bare existence of the work in our libraries? Its author is now beyond the reach of our thanks,

but let it receive at least the sanction of an official adoption among us. Till the contrary is proved we will give Mr Wesley credit for the meaning fixed by Mr Fletcher upon this proposition. By it we see that it is Christ formed in believers' hearts the hope of glory, who works in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure, and whose grace merits for them the reward of eternal life. Happy are we in theoratically embracing, but still more happy in experimentally knowing the truth of this sound and orthodox principle of divinity!*

The seventh proposition states, that "The grand objection to one of the preceding propositions is drawn from matter of fact. God does in fact justify those who by their own confession neither feared God nor wrought righteousness. Is this an exception to the general rule? It is a doubt whether God makes any exception at all. But how are we sure that the person in question never did fear God and work righteousness? His own saying so is not proof, for we know how all that are convinced of sin undervalue themselves in every respect."

The objection here stated lies against the third primary proposition, which has already undergone ample discussion. The principle therein opposed is seen the apparent stress laid on the words "in order to find favour." The circumstance of a man's fearing God and working righteousness, as far as he may be capable of

* It would be as unjust as illiberal, an equal breach of truth and charity, to insinuate or suppose that the author would not have felt equal pleasure in bearing the same testimony to all the other propositions of these minutes as to this one, if he could have done so with a good conscience. But this was impossible. Nothing but a sincere and ardent attachment to truth could induce him to controvert any portion of the works of the venerable founder of the religious body, of which he counts it an honour to be a member. He, however, has exercised his indisputable privilege in candidly laying his thoughts before the public. Let them be either admitted or refuted with the same candour, and in the true spirit of that gospel we would defend.

doing so before his actual conversion, is in itself beyond all doubt, justifiable, and even praise-worthy, and by the preventing grace of God, which is common to all men, is in a degree practicable; but it is a dangerous and hetrodox principle to inculcate, and particularly so under the christian dispensation, that these works are admissible as a legitimate condition whereon to ground our hopes of finding acceptance with God; for this is directly and palpably seeking to be justified by the deeds of the law, which we know is contrary to the express and repeated declaration of St Paul *, as well of Mr Wesley himself on other occasions, as we have already seen.

The question, therefore, whether a man has, previous to his actual conversion, "feared God and wrought righteousness according to the light he has," is of no kind of consequence as to his justification; he may have done so, or he may not; but if his present repentance be sincere, and his faith genuine, he is equally eligible, (provided he abandons all confidence in his own righteousness, as a recommendation to the favour of God,) to justification, whether he had been previously an abandoned profligate or a self-righteous Pharisee, for both these characters have equal need of being washed in the blood of Christ, to render either themselves or their works acceptable in the sight of a pure and holy God. And assuredly the annals of Methodism, and those recorded by Mr Wesley himself, afford us ample illustration of the fact (and a fact which that venerable divine glories in relating,) that multitudes of *notorious sinners* were suddenly arrested by the power of God, when sitting under his sacred word, and being pointed to "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world," obtained redemption in his blood, the forgiveness of their sins, and were instantly justified by

* Romans, iii. 20. &c.

faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and went home to their houses rejoicing in a sin-pardoning God, with joy unspeakable and full of glory *. Must we surrender all these trophies of grace to the legality of these propositions, and divest our connexion of the glory of these extraordinary conversions, to enable us to reduce christianity to a level with heathenism? God forbid!

That the fearing of God and working righteousness, as far as man has the power of doing so previous to his justification, is right and good, no man who pretends to any regard for the moral interests of mankind can call in question. Yet even this may be abused, and perverted into an obstacle in the way of conversion, instead of a means of promoting it. And this is done when those works are laid down as the condition of a sinner's acceptance with God, and thus substituted in the place of "faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ," which, according to Mr Wesley's doctrine, is the whole and sole cause, and only foundation of our acceptance. We regret to observe, that the object of the third primary proposition alluded to in the seventh of the secondary series now under consideration, appears to be to lead unconverted men to trust in their own works as the source of their introduction to the favour of God; a principle which we cannot embrace without at once abandoning the essential doctrines of christianity, and reverting to the abrogated principles of judaism or heathenism as the medium of our restoration to the divine favour †.

That this is the unhappy design of the proposition appears fur-

* In some cases these men had stones in their hands when arrested by the power of God, for the express purpose of knocking down the preacher! Were these men "then fearing God and working righ eousness?"

† Let us not forget that God once commissioned an angel from heaven for the express purpose of correcting this very error in a man, who from an upright heathen had probably became a Jewish proselyte. This was Cornelius, the account of whose conversion is recorded in the tenth chapter of the Acts.

ther corroborated by the concluding sentiments which follow in the eighth and last proposition; the evident tendency of which is to depreciate the glory of a state of justification or sanctification, and to advance the intrinsic merit of a believer's work to the office of preserving him in the favour of God. Its language is: "Does not talking of a justified or sanctified state tend to mislead men; almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? Whereas, we are every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to our works. According to the whole of our inward tempers and outward behaviour."

If this is the fact, we must say that Mr Wesley himself has been notoriously guilty of misleading his followers; for it may be questioned if, since the days of St Paul, any man ever talked so much, or to so good purpose, about a justified or sanctified state, as Mr Wesley himself has done *. Indeed, he and his very able and pious assistants talked and wrote on these happy and glorious privileges of the children of God, until they became the honoured instruments of introducing thousands of abandoned sinners, and even a few self-

This man truly feared God and wrought righteousness to the utmost of his ability, and he doubtless sought acceptance with God on that foundation. But that could not be; both the heathenish and the Jewish dispensations were now at an end, and life and immortality were now brought to light by the gospel of Christ. Cornelius was within the sound of that gospel, and he must abandon all confidence in his own righteousness, and "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" for his justification. In this respect God made no distinction between the pious Cornelius and the wicked jailor at Philippi; who a moment before his conversion was a bitter persecutor of two apostles, and so far from fearing God, that he was on the point of killing himself in a fit of despair! Yet this man, as well as Cornelius, was instantaneously justified. By what? By fearing God and working righteousness? Not at all; but by "Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ!" God then changed his heart, and he became at once a righteous man! See Acts, xvi. 23.-34.

* For a proof of the high esteem in which Mr Wesley previously held these two states, and the little danger he then apprehended from freely speaking of them, we may refer, 1st, to the Minutes of Conference in 1747;

righteous Pharisees also into the actual enjoyment of these inestimable blessings. Nor did they ever dream of any injurious tendency which could accrue to the interests of religion, from either the promulgation or enjoyment of them, until these minutes started this strange objection against their propagation.

Indeed, till then they were considered as the peculiar glory of Methodism; and the grand points at which all our public and private discourses aimed; and to the attainment of which, as the ultimate objects of preaching, preparatory to the enjoyment of eternal felicity, the views of our people were uniformly directed. And their success justified the wisdom of the proceeding; the spirit of God bore witness to its truth and propriety by making the hearers the happy partakers of this great salvation. And let it be ever remembered, that whatever value a gracious God may place upon the works of a true believer, that value is derived solely from those very states of justification and sanctification, which are here attempted to be thrown into the back ground as scarce worthy of notice; nay, as almost injurious to the cause of religion! For it is a state of justification which unites the soul of a believer to Jesus his living head, the true source of all that is great and good in every soul of man; and it is a state of sanctification which enables us to offer up

and 2d, to his celebrated work entitled *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.* An extract from the former follows.

"*Question.*—Do we ordinarily represent a justified state so great and happy as it is?—*Answer.* Perhaps not. A believer walking in the light is inexpressibly great and happy.

Question.—Should we not have a care of depreciating justification, in order to exalt the state of full sanctification?—*Answer.* Undoubtedly we should beware of this.

Question.—How shall we effectually avoid it?—*Answer.* When we are going to speak of *entire sanctification* let us first describe *the blessings of a justified state as strongly as possible.*"

The *Plain Account* is an admirable essay on the doctrine of sanctification, and too valuable to be suffered to fall into neglect or disuse.

our words and works, our thoughts and desires to God as an acceptable sacrifice through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose imputed merits and imparted righteousness alone stamp our works with a meritorious value, in the sight of a pure and holy God.

That believers are pleasing to God in proportion to the degree of his divine image which shines in their hearts, and of the holiness which adorns their lives and conversation, is an unquestionable fact; and certainly all unfaithfulness to the grace of God in his children is displeasing in his sight. But it would require some proof to shew, that conversing upon the happiness of either a justified or a sanctified state is naturally productive of deviations either from inward holiness, or an upright walk with God. And if this cannot be proved, why should it be insinuated? Or why insinuate that holy dispositions and good works can render a believer acceptable to God, detached from the consideration of those states which alone can give them birth, or keep them in action? With all deference to the wisdom which dictated those lines, we do conceive that this is indeed calculated to mislead men from the stability of that faith which works by love, into a very unjustifiable confidence in the merit of their own works; and even to induce believers to forget that "it is God who worketh in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

Is it possible then that any danger can arise to the interests of religion, from the free inculcation of these glorious privileges, the undoubted birth-right of every child of God under the christian dispensation? Certainly not. Nor are we by any means justifiable in thus detaching the works of a believer from the state which produces those works. God, we know, hath united these, and we say let not man attempt to put them asunder! And assuredly it is much safer even to trust in what was done for us in the moments of re-

* Phillipians, ii. 12.

ceiving those important blessings, than in any of our works subsequent to them*. For beyond all controversy, it is the state of justification which gives us a title to eternal salvation, and that of sanctification which imparts the qualification requisite for the enjoyment of glory, honour, and immortality. Is it necessary then, to

* That the good works of believers are entitled, under the covenant of redemption, to a reward proportioned to their value in the estimation of him who hath declared he will "give unto every one of us according to our works" (Rev. ii 23,) is an unquestionable fact, which has been distinctly admitted under the sixth minor proposition. But this fact rests upon the evangelical sentiment there established upon the authority of St Paul, as explained by Mr Fletcher, viz. that it is the spirit of Christ who worketh in believers both to will and to do of the good pleasure of God their heavenly Father. All the merit of their works is derived from their union with Christ, as the grape derives its rich juice and flavour from the vine which gives it birth; and of these it is truly testified by St Paul (Rom. viii. 4,) "that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." This sentiment is finely illustrated in the following stanza from one of Mr Wesley's hymns,

"The glorious crown of righteousness
To me reached out I view;
Conqueror through him I soon shall seize,
And wear it as my due."

The following anecdote of Mr Wesley, related by his biographer, Doctor Whitehead, is interesting, from the view it gives us of the sentiments which occupied the mind of that eminent man, on the subject of the merit of works, at a moment when we may naturally suppose he spoke the genuine feelings of his mind.

"At the Bristol conference in 1783, Mr Wesley was taken very ill; neither he nor his friends thought he could recover. From the nature of his complaint he supposed a spasm would seize his stomach and probably occasion sudden death. Under these views of his situation he said to Mr Bradford, "I have been reflecting on my past life. I have been wandering up and down between fifty and sixty years, endeavouring in my poor way to do a little good to my fellow-creatures: and now it is probable that there are but a few steps between me and death; and what have I to trust to for salvation? I can see nothing which I have done or suffered that will bear looking at. I have no other plea than this, "I the chief of sinners am, but Jesus

lose sight of both our title to, and qualification for heaven, in order to render our persons and our works pleasing and acceptable to God? Alas! whither will our Arminian principles drive us at last? They have already carried us beyond the bounds of christianity into the heart of judaism, and to the borders of heathenism!

Upon a candid and impartial review of these celebrated propositions, we feel ourselves constrained to admit that they are unguardedly, as well as ambiguously worded; and whatever may have been the original design in publishing them, detached as they are from the evangelical principles of christianity, they have a general tendency to subvert those principles, and infuse a notion of obtaining justification by the deeds of the law, instead of depending solely on the merits of Christ for that important blessing. It is

died for me." The sentiment here expressed, and his reference to it in his last sickness, plainly shews how steadily he had persevered in the same views of the gospel with which he set out to preach it."

We cannot, from this declaration, suppose that Mr Wesley had abandoned all hope of obtaining a reward in eternity, agreeable to the doctrine of his own minutes, "*Secundum merita operum*;" but we find he could not venture to repose the hope of salvation exclusively upon so precarious a foundation as his own works, however splendid they might appear in the eyes of others. For his title to heaven he chose to rest his hopes upon the merits of his Redeemer's passion, imputed to him in the article of justification fifty years before this time. Yet, he doubtless indulged an humble confidence that his adorable Saviour would proportion his degree of celestial glory and eternal felicity, to the extent of his zeal and labour in promoting the interests of his Redeemer's kingdom among men. If he did not do this, he must have practically denied the doctrine contained in the proposition above alluded to; and that at a time of all others the most fit to bring it to the test of experience. We naturally suppose his modesty would not suffer him to express any confidence on that ground, on so solemn an occasion; he left the estimation of his works, and the reward he expected from them, to the decision of that righteous judge into whose hands he was about to commend his spirit. Yet he evidently preferred trusting in what was done for him in the moment of justification, for salvation, to confiding in his own subsequent works as any ground of his final acceptance with God. This is an important point for our consideration.

true Mr Fletcher has most strenuously laboured, by bringing a beam of gospel light to bear upon them, to dissipate the ambiguity which rests upon some, to fix a less obnoxious meaning upon others than what they evidently contain, and to cast an evangelical mantle over the whole; yet while we admire the ingenuity of his able apology, we cannot but lament that there ever was occasion for its appearance. Why should propositions, which are supposed to contain fundamental principles of our holy religion, be so obscurely expressed, so equivocal in their meaning, so legal, vague, and unsatisfactory in their conclusions, as to require the talents of a Fletcher to give them a plausible interpretation, and the addition of innumerable auxiliary principles to impart to them an evangelical aspect, and keep them afloat even on the waves of controversy? And why was even Mr Fletcher's defence of the minutes never honoured with the public approbation of Mr Wesley? Surely propositions like those, purporting to contain essential truths of christianity, should possess internal and conclusive evidence of their own purity and excellence; but since this was not the case, Mr Wesley owed to the religious world, and especially to his own people, either a satisfactory explanation of these propositions, reconciling them to the evangelical principles of that gospel he had successfully taught for thirty preceding years; or, if that was found impracticable, a retraction of those sentiments which threw a shade over the most splendid of his former works, and carried Methodism back to the dispensation of Jews and heathens for new principles, after a triumphant display of evangelical truth in the hearts and lives of its happy possessors for such a length of time!

It is true, that in the letter which forms the introduction to this Appendix, Mr Wesley refers to three other publications, which he says are calculated to throw light on those minutes; but many of our people cannot procure those publications, and if they had them,

are we sure they remove the difficulties of the minutes?* Rather, do they not increase our perplexity, by presenting discrepances in doctrine, when contrasted with these minutes, which no art can reconcile, but which charity would fain bury in oblivion, if truth did not demand an explanation? That explanation we, that is the whole Methodist body, have a right to demand from our present teachers; and if they favour us with any thing like the code recommended in the former part of this work, we confidently trust these minutes will not escape a revisal therein.

The author cannot conclude these remarks without offering a few observations elicited by the too prevalent inclination apparent in many of our people, to resort to the deeds of the law, as the legitimate source of recommendation both for saints and sinners, to the favour and approbation of God. We know "the law is good if a man use it lawfully;"† it is a transcript of the divine mind; of the will of God revealed to man. But its adorable author, in the unsearchable counsels of his wisdom, hath long since determined, that the fulfilment of this law in their own persons shall not be the medium of his reconciliation with sinners ‡; yet his justice hath secured the honour of that law in the complete righteousness of his only begotten Son; with that righteousness God hath declared himself completely satisfied, and, upon the strength of its merit, he is prepared to treat with every returning sinner who believes his testimony and ventures his soul upon his promises, as though that sinner had himself personally fulfilled every branch of the law. There can therefore be no necessity for that sinner to resort to a laboured and most imperfect conformity to the precepts of the law, as the medium of his restoration to the favour of God;

* On a recent inquiry for one of them at the Methodist Book-room, Dublin, the author's friend was informed it had been some years out of print.

† 1 Tim. i. 8. ‡ Rom. iii. 20.—viii. 3.

nay, his doing so, however plausible his pretence for it may appear, is a tacit renunciation of the terms which the wisdom and mercy of God hath adopted, as the only mode of his restoration to the divine favour.

What purpose then does the moral law serve under the christian dispensation? St Paul informs us that, taken in conjunction with the fallen state of man, its primary use is "to give the knowledge of sin:" * convincing its subject of the utter impossibility of his fulfilling its divine precepts in a manner acceptable to God, and thereby cutting off every hope of justification by the deeds of the law; and its only operation in its legislative capacity towards man, is to seal his condemnation, pronouncing upon him, as a transgressor of its holy precepts, the sentence of eternal death †. Our propensity therefore to effect the reconciliation of sinners to God, through the medium of obedience to the precepts of the law, is contrary to the order of providence, opposed to the economy of grace, and subversive of the gospel-plan of salvation; and, of course, highly injurious to the cause of religion.

For as long as a sinner entertains the most distant hope of effecting his reconciliation with God, by his obedience to the moral law, so long he will be kept from closing in with Christ, and obtaining "redemption in his blood, the forgiveness of his sins;" and until this is done, his heart remains in a carnal and unregenerate state; and in this state of mind his external conformity to the law, attempted as the source or medium of his restoration to the favour of God, while unaccompanied by faith in Christ, tends to divert his attention from that which, according to Mr Wesley's primitive doctrine, should be the only object of his faith and pursuit: namely, "the righteousness of Christ imputed to him as the source of his

* Romans, iii. 20.—viii. 3.

† 2 Corinthians, iii. 7.

justification,"* "Christ being the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth on him."† To Christ alone, therefore, and to his imputed merits and powerful mediation, and not to his own works in any degree, should the views of every penitent sinner be directed, for admission to the favour of God.

But has the believer in Christ nothing to do with the moral law? Certainly he has; but not with the penalties attached to its breach; "for there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit."‡ He is, however, "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ;"§ but being born of God, the law of his heavenly Father is written on his heart, and he obeys its divine precepts from a new and most powerful principle, even the love of God, which is shed abroad in his heart by the holy ghost given unto him. And this he does, not because the fabric of that law was, under the Jewish dispensation, engraven upon stones and delivered to Moses; but because, being liberated from the bondage and condemnation of the whole Mosaic dispensation ||, and living under the milder dispensation of mercy and grace, he is become a new creature in Christ; and the evangelised principles of the law, divested of its condemning power by the blood of Christ, are interwoven with his new nature, and he lives and acts under the powerful influence of that divine spirit who is the source of all goodness and perfection, and from whose holy nature the law itself originally emanated. Thus is the holiness of the child of God secured by the inspiration of that spirit, which first brought him from the bondage of sin into the glorious liberty of the gospel of peace! Hence we perceive the le-

* Sermon on "*The Lord Our Righteousness.*" † Rom. x. 4.

‡ Romans, viii. 1. § 1 Corinthians, ix. 21.

|| See this glorious doctrine asserted, and proved at large by St Paul, in the 3d chapter of the Second Epistle to the Church at Corinth. Why should not the Methodists preach the same gospel with St Paul?

gitimate use of the moral law under the christian dispensation, is first, in its penal and legislative capacity, to convince us of sin, destroy our hopes of justification by obedience to its precepts, and drive us to the atoning blood of Christ for pardon and peace with God. And, secondly, in its preceptive power and sanctifying influence to be the medium through which every true believer is by the spirit of God led into the recovery of the divine image in his soul. On this point, so clearly revealed in the inspired writings, particularly the New Testament, christians of every denomination ought most cordially to agree. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God!"

THE END.

BELFAST,
Printed by George Berwick.

*** The Author finds himself obliged to appeal to the indulgence of his readers for the correction of the following omissions, which have escaped alteration in part of the impression. He is not conscious of any other; but if any should be found, the reader is requested to correct them. When it is considered that this work has been printed off with remarkable expedition, and that the Author's time is almost entirely absorbed in the management of an extensive secular concern, he trusts those inaccuracies will be the more readily excused.

Page 353, Note, first line, after ubiquity, read, *holiness, eternity, and immutability.*—*Page* 374, 2d paragraph, 9th line, dele *as.*—*Page* 400, Note, 7th line from bottom, after *ambition*, read, *at the gentle restraints.*